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**Beyond Conventions: A Psycho-educational  
Perspective on Children's Right to Participation**

**by**

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## **Declaration**

For all due purposes I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.



## Summary

This thesis addresses the concept of ‘children’s right to participation’. In an effort of conceptualisation, it starts by providing a definition of four views through which this right might be considered: *inalienable*; *statutory*; *granted*; *exercised*.

Several levels at which these views may operate are also examined. These include *macro*-, *meso*- and *micro*-levels. Notwithstanding the importance of *macro*- and *meso*-levels, a case is made for the appropriateness of *micro*-levels as loci for both the research and the exercise of participation rights. This is a view stemming from the psycho-educational perspective in which this thesis is inscribed.

The importance of going *beyond Conventions* and concentrating research efforts in that the *exercise* of participation becomes a reality for children in their everyday lives is highlighted. It was deemed that undertaking a case study in a primary school would be helpful in that effort. Two research questions were examined through such design:

Question 1: How can the ‘exercised right to participation’ in the primary school be defined?

Question 2: What are the factors that influence such participation?

In order to explore the first question, a *set of indicators* regarding granted and exercised participation was conceived, and it was applied in Santa Maria primary school (Portugal). This encompassed the school as a whole, the different classrooms and individual children. The results led to the conclusion that Santa Maria school, as a whole, did not appear to constitute a participation-oriented ethos. However, some elements indicated the existence of important discrepancies among the different classrooms, namely in what concerned the participation experiences of the children that attended them.

With regards to the second research question, several hypotheses were defined as to the factors that might influence the exercise of participation. These included: the children’s age, the children’s personal characteristics as well as the teachers’ attitudes. The latter seemed to prevail as a determining factor, which entails considerable implications for future research undertakings as well as potential pragmatic interventions.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Children's right to participation: Exploring a concept**

#### **1.1. Introduction**

This chapter addresses the concept of child participation. It will be argued that this concept has not yet reached a consensual definition and that multiple arguments have been put forward to justify its significance. The argument used in this thesis is that of 'participation as a right for children'. That view is, therefore, explored more thoroughly in the current chapter. It is suggested that, although multiple manifestations of this right are presented in the literature, they can all be subsumed under four basic views. These have been devised for the purpose of this review and encompass the views of participation a): as an inalienable right, b) as a statutory right, c) as a granted right, and d) as an exercised right. These concepts are advanced and defined in this chapter and their use as structuring elements of the literature review and the empirical study is also discussed.

#### **1.2. Child Participation as an umbrella term**

The expression 'child participation' has been utilised in numerous senses in different bodies of literature. In fact, it can be argued that, rather than having well defined boundaries, this phrase has been used as an umbrella term to designate a vast array of attitudes and behaviours. The following table (table 1.1) includes several of them:



Table 1.1: Attitudes and behaviours identified with child participation.

---

<input type="checkbox"/>	Expressing views and being entitled to one's opinion / freedom of expression (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Holden, 1998; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997; Wood, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Having one's views taken into account (Holden, 1998) and being listened to (Kufeldt, 1993; Osler, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Being critical (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Making choices (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 1995; Wood, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Being involved in decision-making (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997; Pridmore, 2000; Wood, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Taking part in democratic voting processes (Hart & Schwab, 1997)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning about citizenship and democracy (Holden, 1998; Naval, Murray & Veldhuis, 2002)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning about rights and responsibilities (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Holden, 1996; John, 1998; Wood, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involvement in research data about one's own life (Campbell, 2002; John, 1996; Pridmore, 2000)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-determination (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Eckelaar, 1994)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Becoming autonomous and independent (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Freeman, 1992b; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997; Wood, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Thinking creatively (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Wood, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Planning one's own activities (Wood, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Being involved in civic action (Hart, 2002; Moore, 1992; Nader, 1992) and community service (Wade & Everett, 1994)

---

As it can be appreciated in table 1.1, there is a multiplicity of attitudes and behaviours that have been considered as pertaining to the realm of child participation. However – and even if some have been utilised in such a way – none of them can be asserted to define it on its own: the concept seems to possess a composite nature and its constitutive elements cannot be considered as equivalent, interchangeable or as representative of the whole concept (Cussiánovich, 2001).

It is true, on the one hand, that the multiplicity of attitudes and behaviours proposed as manifestations of child participation reflects the richness of the concept and its potential for a large scope of applications. Nonetheless, the lack of a consensual interpretation poses difficulties to its research (Casas, 1997; Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996). It seems, therefore, necessary to establish firstly why these attitudes and behaviours related to 'child participation' are seen by so many as being beneficial for children. It seems pertinent, as well, to explore the modalities, loci and extent of their application. This exercise constitutes the object of the next section, which has, simultaneously, the intent



of establishing a common understanding as to the sense in which the concept will be used in the context of this thesis.

### **1.3. Rationale for child participation**

If numerous elements have been asserted to compose the concept of ‘child participation’, an analogous diversity of arguments has been put forward to justify its pertinence and importance. Some authors follow a *pragmatic* argument, which translates primarily into the claim that adult interventions directed at children will produce better results and be more appropriate if the children participate in them (DfES, 2001; Figg, Keeton, Parkes & Richards, 1996; Gersch, 1987). Others have stressed *ethical* and *moral* arguments (Gersch, 1987; Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997) seeing participation as a matter of justice for children (Pridmore, 2000). Yet another argument sustains that participation is beneficial to children’s development (Smith, 2002; Wood, 1998). However, one of the strongest arguments presented in the literature is that children have a *right to participation* (e.g. Freeman, 1992b; Hart, 1992; John, 1996). Children’s right to participation is, therefore, the argument that will occupy this discussion.

### **1.4. The view of participation as a right for children**

In the early stages of this research it became evident that the argument of child participation as a right was not conceived similarly by the different authors, who addressed it in a variety of ways. However, it is believed that the different ways in which the argument is addressed in the current literature have not, up to this moment,

been articulated or categorised. This has led to a single designation – i.e. children’s right to participation – being used to refer to very different manifestations of the right.

As an attempt for better definition of that designation, four concepts are now proposed with the intent to clarify and sum up the ways this argument has, to date, been presented. It is believed that they are comprehensive of the diverse uses present in the literature. The four concepts will hereafter be designated according to whether they present children’s participation:

- A) As an inalienable right;
- B) As a statutory right;
- C) As a granted right;
- D) As an exercised right.

A few caveats are in order as to the nature of the concepts proposed. These will be briefly addressed here but will be gradually discussed in further detail throughout the thesis: Firstly, it should be noted that the terminology regarding these four concepts was created for the purpose of this exercise and does not refer to pre-existing terms (judicial or other).

Furthermore, it is believed that the concepts are not mutually exclusive, and are indeed used complementarily in many pieces of literature. It is suggested that the view of participation as an inalienable right (A) has originated and is at the basis of the other three views (B, C, D), which represent, consequently, translations or interpretations of that first concept. Several explanations have, therefore, been volunteered as to the way

these three interpretations (B, C, D) interrelate among themselves and with the view of participation as an inalienable right (A).

As will be seen ahead, they (B, C and D) may or may not, be organised in a hierarchical fashion, but it can be argued that they are always manifestations of the ‘inalienable right’ view (A). It is believed that the statutory, granted and exercised views suffer the influence of several filters in that translation and, hence, are not an exact or faithful reproduction of all the principles of the ‘inalienable right’ view. It can moreover be affirmed that the postulated goal of the writings portraying the first three views (A, B, C) is to contribute to the fourth (D) being a reality, i.e. that there is an effective exercise of the right to participation by children.

Finally, it should be noted that, if the ‘inalienable right’ view (A) can remain in the realm of ideological and/ or rhetorical abstraction, the nature of the latter three (B, C and D) demands an application in concrete loci. That application in successive fora constitutes the object of chapters 2 to 4 of this review.

The current chapter will, therefore, proceed to a brief definition of the four concepts that have been devised, keeping in mind that they are presented here solely for definition purposes and will be more thoroughly discussed when their application in concrete loci is addressed.

#### **1.4.1. Participation as an ‘inalienable’ right: its characteristics**

The view of participation as an inalienable right is probably the most complex of the four views on children’s right to participation and the one that represents the strongest



ideological commitment to that principle. It is the view reflected by those more directly and politically engaged in the child participation cause (e.g. Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; John, 1996), who often claim to be the ‘researchers and practitioners around the world who value the freedom of child citizens of today, and realise that the responsibilities of tomorrow will be theirs’ (John, 1998, p.9). Due to its encompassing nature, this view will be used as a reference throughout the thesis, both theoretically and in the development of the empirical part of the study.

More than a solid definition, it can be said that there are intricate dimensions, which articulate to form the concept. Therefore, the right to participation is conceived as being vested with certain attributes, which will be examined below:

1.4.1.1. Being universal in its scope and exercise;

1.4.1.2. Being against any form of discrimination undermining the access to the right;

1.4.1.3. Sharing a non-traditional conception of the child and childhood;

1.4.1.4. Focusing on the psychological benefits participation has for the child;

1.4.1.5. Being fundamental for the advancement of democracy and citizenship;

1.4.1.6. Being a matter of power-sharing.

#### **1.4.1.1. Being universal in its scope and exercise**

Among the proponents of participation as a right, there seem to be two different views as to whom that right should be awarded: one view suggests that the right to participation is a universal and absolute right for every child to enjoy (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Hart & Schwab, 1997; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997; Wood, 1998); a somewhat opposite view suggests that certain pre-requisites (e.g.

in terms of age and/ or maturity) have to be in place for the child to be awarded that right (Lowy, 1992). The latter view questions whether children below a certain age or level of maturity have the ‘competence’ to exercise the right to participation (Verhellen, 1993). It is, therefore, a view by which ‘competence to exercise rights’ is somewhat inferred *a priori* from a second variable.

The ‘inalienable right’ view falls, however, within the former stance. In fact, the perspective it volunteers is that developmental factors, such as low age or being designated as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) are not preclusive of the right to participation (Lansdown, 1998). The main argument used to support this point of view is primarily ideological, lying in that if participation is seen as a right, that right is to be exercised by *all* children. The right is then seen as irrevocable, since it is considered that ‘if persons have moral rights to something, they are to be accorded these rights even if an utilitarian calculation shows that utility would be maximized by denying it to them’ (Freeman, 1992b, p.61). Therefore, ‘in this theoretical context, the right to participate in different areas should have no age limits’ (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997, p.280).

Yet, this ideological view is complemented by the analysis of the developmental characteristics that, even from early infant-hood, are believed to enable children’s participation (Cousins, 1996; Hart & Schwab, 1997; Wood, 1998). Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997, p.90) argue, for instance, ‘that interaction with other people from birth establishes a basis for more active participation later on and that unless we are willing to accept that self-expression and participation actually start at least at birth, it is impossible to determine when the exercise of these rights begins’.



Therefore, these authors suggest that, not only the right to participation should never be denied, but also that all children have certain competencies that allow them to participate, thus challenging more restrictive views on this issue. It is argued that development should be used only as a *guide* to the modalities that participation can assume and as a reference for the conditions that need to be adapted to specific children, so that participation can become effective, but never as a criterion for denying access to participation rights to children not corresponding to certain pre-determined age or maturity boundaries (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997). This would be true not only in terms of ‘age’ but also in the case of children designated as having SEN (DfES, 2001; Erickson & Koppenhaver, 1995; Helion & Fry, 1995). They propose, therefore, that there should not be an automatic inference of competence based on those variables. Unquestionably, however, none of these authors proposes that developmental factors do not play a role in the *modalities* that participation can assume. Such modalities can imply, for instance, manipulating the organism (child), the environment or the task / activity itself (Soules et al. 1994, cited in Helion & Fry, 1995), but participation is always conceived as possible and never denied as a right.

There is, nonetheless, a certain tension, which cannot be ignored, between an approach where development is seen as a pre-condition to the exercise of participation rights and the ‘inalienable right’ view’s proposal to the effect that the two aspects can be reconciled. The former will henceforth be designated as a ‘pseudo-competence approach’; ‘pseudo’ because competence is inferred *a priori* from other variables, such as chronological age, SEN or maturity. This issue will be discussed in the next section and will also constitute one of transversal objects of interest of this thesis. However, as a general idea to be retained from this section, it can be said that, according to the

‘inalienable right’ view, participation is seen as a matter of principle: if it is a right, then it is to be exercised by all, provided the necessary adaptations (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Wood, 1998).

#### **1.4.1.2. Being against any form of discrimination undermining the access to the right**

This is an element that stems directly from the previous one: it is considered that ‘pseudo-competence approaches’ are very restrictive, that they should not be used to impede the participation of children not corresponding to the enunciated criteria, and that developmental characteristics should also not be a source of discrimination in the *access* to the right (DfES, 2001). Therefore, these authors take on different developmental models (Hart, Daiute, Iltus, Kritt, Rome & Sabo, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997) – which had many a time been considered as deficit models – to uphold the view that development not only allows participation but participation promotes development (Barab & Plucker, 2002; Pridmore, 2000). In fact, it must not be forgotten that the right to participation is portrayed by this view as being always exercisable. In order to support this argument, they (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Hart *et al.*, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997) have proceeded to an analysis of various types of developmental characteristics that are, at different ages, directly relevant for the exercise of participation rights and give testimony of children’s competencies – in a non-restrictive sense – in this domain.

Consequently, developmental aspects are not considered by these authors as determining the point where the fruition of participation should start, depending on the child’s presumed competence and readiness. On the contrary they are taken as a



reference of *how* that fruition should take place and *what* it should look like, taking into account the child's most relevant capacities at each step. The cornerstones of such logic are that 'the capacity to participate and to listen is learned, through practice from infancy' (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997, p.291) and that "'competence' is not an 'all or nothing', but develops gradually, particularly if the child has opportunities to try out budding skills' (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.68). As mentioned above, the supporters of this view consider that these concepts are applicable not only in terms of development defined as chronological age, but also in the case of children designated as having SEN (Hart *et al.*, 1997).

The focus shall now be put on the analyses that these authors have performed upon classic developmental models in order to discern in them the elements which, in their view, reveal that in all developmental stages, children *do* possess competencies to exercise participation rights, therefore contesting a 'pseudo-competence' approach. Hart *et al.* (1997, p.35) have assessed developmental models stemming 'from the perspectives of the psychodynamic tradition, the social psychology tradition, narrative psychology, and feminist psychology'. They found that the insights from these different perspectives were complementary and included some basic common traits. One of those traits is that all the models presented development as eminently social, instead of being seen as an exclusively individual process. This aspect accentuates the role of caregivers, of their attitudes and of their expectations (Perry *et al.*, 2002; Staub & Stern, 2002). The other aspect was that 'all of these theories offer common observations about children's orientations to the world in different *phases* in their development' (Hart *et al.*, 1997, p.36, emphasis added).

A very important caveat is that this omnipresent notion of *phases* or *stages* of development should never be taken rigidly (Alderson, 1999) or it would certainly be discredited: firstly, because the formulation of such phases has been often pointed out as somewhat culturally biased (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997); and secondly, for the models have many a time been proven inaccurate with regards to the age they suggest that children would reach each phase or stage (Smith, 2002). These notions can, nonetheless, be of a certain use to this exercise, if put in the appropriate perspective, i.e. that of being used in a western European context and with a flexible approach as to the ages mentioned. In fact, as mentioned above, the main intent is not to discuss these stages *per se* but to present and assess the developmental elements, characteristic of different stages, which are purported as contributing to children's participation capacities. Owing to the nature of this literature review exercise, this presentation will necessarily have to be summarised, focusing only on the points that are most relevant to the topic being studied.

### *First years of life*

Ochaíta and Espinosa (1997, p.285) argue that 'from birth, babies experience a great need to communicate with other human beings'. Newborns are, then, capable of receiving and imparting information, of imitation and reciprocity in their interactions and of influencing the behaviour of those that surround them (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). These traits can be taken as incipient participation capacities, even if it can also be argued that these behaviours do not constitute real participation because the newborn baby's influence is unconscious and unplanned and it may be impossible to determine exactly when changes to that situation occur (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). Nevertheless, for those who uphold this view, these elements, however incipient, constitute



manifestations of participatory capacities that need to be considered when interacting with children in this stage (Harris, 1994).

Two determinant new abilities for participating evolve from the first to the second year of life: one is the ability to crawl, which implies that infants will no longer be as dependent on caregivers to attain their objectives; and the other is the development of language, through which the child will gradually understand and respond to verbal interaction (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). The child 'will also start verbalizing his or her own demands and wishes, indicating that the child is beginning to be able to reflect upon himself / herself' (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.93). Hence, it may be argued that 'self-assertion, the drive towards self-determination, self-control and independence, dominate much of the child's behaviour during the second year. A secure child, who trusts in the basic good will of adults, can explore the limits of what is allowed' (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.94).

Therefore, in order to summarise this section, it can be mentioned that the developmental elements identified as contributing to the child's participation during his / her first years or life include: the ability to exchange information with the world; the increase of independent locomotion; and the development of language and communicative skills. The role of caregivers and their attitudes are considered here as fundamental in supporting the young child in his / her developmental efforts (Dallos, 1996; Smith, 2002).

### *The pre-school years*

It is suggested that there are two major advancements at this stage in what concerns the developmental elements which are relevant to participation: once again, one of these

relates to the development of language, which – around age three to four – becomes more conventionalised and elaborated. It is argued that there is ‘less reference to private, subjective, emotional and context-dependent associations’ (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.96), which enables the child to establish more effective communication. The other aspect is a great evolution in the capacity for perspective-taking. Indeed, ‘to be able to participate in an active, conscious way with other people (...) children must be able to comprehend that the other may have different points of view’ (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.94). In fact, around age six, even if they’re not yet totally able to conceive their own actions from the other’s point of view, children can ‘make the distinction between self-centred and other-centred viewpoints’ (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.95). Language developments and a great progress in the capacity for perspective-taking constitute, then, the abilities considered as most relevant for participation at this stage.

### *The primary-school-aged child*

It is considered that ‘at this stage, children acquire cognitive competence, which Piaget called ‘concrete logical thinking’, which allows them a greater participation (...). These capacities provoke in them a greater need to communicate, express their opinions and participate in (...) contexts in which they learn participation’ (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997, p.289). Children in this age group are described as ‘enthusiastic, outward-looking, and industrious’ (Hart *et al.*, 1997, p.36).

Also, ‘there is little doubt that rules and morals are of particular concern and interest to children during this period, developing from an individual-based, to a concrete perception of rules and morals as issues of principle, necessary for the functioning of society’ (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.100-101). Hence, group-membership is seen as



fundamental at this stage, with children not only developing the capacity for functioning in a peer group, but with that factor also being determinant for their social development and, thus, for their participation capacities. In fact, peer relations are vested with certain characteristics that cannot be reproduced in adult-child interactions. The latter 'are usually characterized by one-way instruction or guidance from adults. Interactions among peers are considered to provide greater developmental opportunities because of a greater degree of bi-directional give-and-take. The greater flexibility afforded by peer interaction allows children to test their understandings and adapt them to the requirements of ongoing interaction' (Hart *et al.*, 1997, pp.42-43). This is seen as crucial for the development of participation because 'in a group of equals a child learns how a democracy functions, what the rules for making rules are and which attitudes, skills and behaviours are acceptable amongst equals' (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.101). There are also gains in terms of perspective-taking in the sense that 'children become increasingly facile with decentrations, enabling them to better understand the other's point of view. This has direct implications for how a child is likely to interact with peers, as well as in groups that might include peers and non-peers' (Hart *et al.*, 1997, p.40).

Therefore, developments in the capacity of perspective-taking are seen, once again, as facilitators of child participation in this stage, as is the child's simultaneous capacity and necessity to function within a peer group.

This section presents an ideological position, inscribed in the 'inalienable right' view, which offers a proposal of how to reconcile developmental issues with the exercise of participation rights, thus questioning 'pseudo-competence' approaches. With their assessment of developmental models, these authors expect to strongly substantiate the

argument that, independently of the stage they are in, children possess certain abilities which enable them to exercise participation rights. Their objective is, therefore, to highlight those abilities in order to support the view that participation rights should never be denied *a priori* based on those variables, but be adapted to each child according to his / her relevant developmental characteristics.

Still, as will be seen throughout the thesis, when participation rights have been transposed from this theoretical arena – i.e. the ‘inalienable right’ view – into more pragmatic expressions – i.e. the statutory, granted and exercised views – this reconciliation, albeit desirable, is not all that easy to accomplish. While the ‘inalienable right’ view may present this issue from a universal rights perspective, many factors come into play and modulate it in its concrete translations. This represents a fundamental aspect with regards to child participation, which will be transversally discussed throughout the thesis, with different approaches and points of view being presented. When both the literature and the empirical data have been examined, a proposal to clarify and reconcile the different views presented will be attempted in the Discussion (chapter 9).

#### **1.4.1.3. Sharing a non-traditional conception of the child and childhood**

According to this perspective, the traditionally romantic and sentimentalised conceptions of childhood, which have been in place throughout most of the twentieth century (Stalford, 2000; Verhellen, 1993), have not favoured or facilitated the development of participation as an inalienable right for children (Mayall, 2000). Wood (1998) affirms that ideas such as ‘maintaining children’s presumed innocence and freedom’ have, many a time, been used in a benign and patronising way. According to



this author, that attitude is not in line with the respect owed to children and undermines their status in society, thus hindering their participation rights.

Therefore, supported by the previously mentioned argument which suggests the non-limitation in the access to participation based on developmental factors, this perspective acknowledges children as fully sentient beings, with their own valid experience (Hart & Schwab, 1997). Furthermore, children are perceived as competent (John, 1998), capable of reflection (Holden & Clough, 1998) and powerful thinkers (Wood, 1998). In short, as 'capable, resourceful people who should be treated as active participants in development' (Pridmore, 2000, p.103) and not patronised (Lewis, 1996). Again, the main idea is that 'children's relative immaturity and inexperience should not be confused as incompetence' (Wood, 1998, p.31). It is argued that adult-child relationships should always reflect this stance and avoid being condescending. The role attributed to adults is that of supporters of children's development, while respecting their participation rights (Armstrong, 2003).

#### **1.4.1.4. Focusing on the psychological benefits participation has for the child**

The supporters of this view possess not only an ideological belief in this stance, but intend to demonstrate through their research efforts, that participation is actually beneficial for the child (Melton & Limber, 1992). These benefits can be classified into two major groups: Those referring to cognitive abilities and those linked with social skills and personal enhancement (Arnold, 2002). Hence, from a cognitive point of view, participation is argued to promote the child's development through the enhancement of knowledge and the improvement of skills such as decision-making capacities (Nagel, 1987, cited in Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Pridmore, 2000). It is also seen as developing

understanding and aiding memory (Pridmore, 2000) as well as promoting autonomy and positive academic performances (d'Ailly, 2003; DfES, 2001).

The development of social skills and personal enhancement is considered at least as important as – if not more than – that of cognitive aspects: Wood (1998) affirms, quite categorically, that participation promotes self-esteem, self-worth and self-efficacy. Additionally, Pridmore (2000) and Nagel (1987, cited in Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997) put the emphasis on the simultaneous benefits regarding one's sense of identity and worth as an autonomous individual and as a community member.

Although this will be discussed in further detail ahead, a caveat must be made, from the very beginning, to these affirmations: this involves the fact that it may be very difficult to establish the existence of a causal relation between the exercise of participation and the development of the above-mentioned characteristics, as the number of extraneous variables is considerable. Nonetheless, as an ideological principle, it can be valid to presume that a context in which participation rights are respected will be more beneficial to a child's development than one in which they are not (Lansdown, 2001).

#### **1.4.1.5. Being fundamental for the advancement of democracy and citizenship**

According to this view, participation is seen as 'the key to preparing children to live in democratic societies and to exercise social responsibility' (Andrews & Freeman, 1997, p.12). Therefore, learning about citizenship and democracy (Naval et al., 2002; Print & Coleman, 2003) and about rights and responsibilities (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Holden, 1996; John, 1998; Wood, 1998) are seen as fundamental aspects to develop. But theorists sharing this view go farther than that, in affirming that only if children *live*



democratically and exercise their participation rights themselves, will they become democratic and engaged citizens as adults (Holden, 1998; Print & Coleman, 2003). Therefore, participation in democratic processes is seen not as reserved for a distant future but as something children are entitled to and can exercise during childhood (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997). As Hart (1992, p.5) asserts 'it is unrealistic to expect them [the children] to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved. An understanding of democratic participation and the confidence and competence to participate can only be acquired gradually through practice; it cannot be taught as an abstraction'.

It is, thus, a perspective of a 'citizen-child', exercising his / her democratic rights (Wood, 1998), including even the right to non-participation (Deardoff, 1996; Pridmore, 2000), i.e. the right of not sharing the views of adults about how his / her participation should occur. This type of approach is best summarised by Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997, p.56) who consider that 'participation theorists lay a firm groundwork for (...) [the] arguments that children and youths need opportunities to participate both for their own developmental benefit and for the benefit of the democratic societies of which they are a part. These benefits are not limited to their role as 'future adults' but also as current potentially contributing members of their families, schools, religious organizations, clubs and communities'.

#### **1.4.1.6. Being a matter of power-sharing**

Participation is seen as a matter of power-sharing between adults and children (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Armstrong, 2003) and, therefore, as potentially empowering for

children, although always on the basis of mutual respect (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Holden, 1998; John, 1996; Wood, 1998). According to this approach, much relies on the attitudes of adults who are to loosen the traditional control they have maintained over children (Griffith, 1996; Pridmore, 2000) and become facilitators (Wood, 1998) as well as nurturers (Andrews & Freeman, 1997).

As a conclusion to the description of the ‘inalienable right’ view, it should not be forgotten that participation as an inalienable right for children remains a rhetorical or ideological point of view (James, 1992), even if it is vested with the apparently positive attributes described above. Hence, as Freeman (1992b, p.53) argues, no matter how well articulated a rhetorical or academic view is, ‘it would be idle to pretend that the answer (...) lies in theory or, indeed, that deliberations at academic conferences will have any immediate impact on the lives of children’. This excerpt highlights the importance of translating these participation principles into practice. Therefore, the focus shall now be put on the three proposed translations into practice of the right to participation for children: the statutory, granted and exercised views.

#### **1.4.2. Participation as a statutory right**

This view can generally be defined as the translation of children’s right to participation into legal dispositions. The regulation of participation rights has furthermore been considered as form of regulating power relationships between adults and children (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; John, 1998).

While the ‘inalienable right’ view depends on the ideological beliefs of a minority, participation as a statutory right extends that right to the rest of society and participation



becomes more mainstream (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). Therefore, if – as will be seen in the following chapters – a statutory view filters and limits the ‘inalienable right’ view; on the other hand, participation becomes a right potentially available to all (Miljeteig-Olsen, 1992). There are, therefore, both amplifying and restrictive consequences for the right of participation for children: the amplification resides in scope (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997); however, legislation has to be negotiated – with the inherent compromising that negotiation entails (Edmonds, 1992; Hart & Schwab, 1997) – between those who conceive participation as an inalienable right and those who have a totally different perception of the role of children in society and of adult-children relationships (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Eekelaar, 1994; Hojat, 1997). If an understanding is to be reached, both views have to be integrated and the statutory right becomes a settlement between the two types of perceptions (Cantwell, 1992; Langevin-Falcon, 1998; Melton, 1996), which will necessarily conduct to restrictions to the right.

As will be seen, an instrument which exemplifies this type of view and constitutes an indisputable landmark in establishing participation as a statutory right for children (Edmonds, 1992; Miljeteig-Olsen, 1992; Sinclair-Taylor, 2000) is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989), which will be presented in chapter 2.

#### **1.4.3. Participation as a granted right**

This view of participation is represented mainly by adults awarding the right to children and putting in place the conditions and mechanisms for them to participate (Wood, 1998). It should be noted that, if formulated solely in these terms, it could easily be

argued that the view of participation as a granted right is equivalent to the above-mentioned statutory view: the distinction lies in the fact that the granted right to participation is intended to be applied to concrete daily situations and relationships between adults and children, which can be – but most of the times are not – legally regulated.

Nevertheless, this view does not automatically imply that effective participation, exercised by children, takes place. It is a view that recognises that ‘the concept of children as citizens, who can participate actively in (...) various communities is relatively recent, and not unproblematic. The nature and extent of their participation is controlled largely by adults, and is dependent on how children are regarded in society’ (Wood, 1998, p.31). It is a view that proposes that adults not only recognise the importance of child participation, but that they to go beyond a favourable attitude, by putting in place – through their behaviour – the mechanisms which will enable children to exercise such rights.

It is a view stemming from the principle that, at least in the beginning, the steps towards the effective participation of children, must be taken by the adults that surround them (Cohen & Naimark, 1991). The role of the adults is, then, that of initiators and prompters (Eskeland, 1996; Hart, 1992). They are attributed, or attribute to themselves, the role of ‘enabling and empowering children’ (Wood, 1998, p.35), i.e. of equipping children for, and supporting them in, their participation efforts (Armstrong, 2003).

Some authors have mentioned that prudence is necessary when managing the degree of support offered to children for the role adults reserve for themselves may often become too substantial (John, 1996; Pridmore, 2000). This is accompanied by the risk of, while



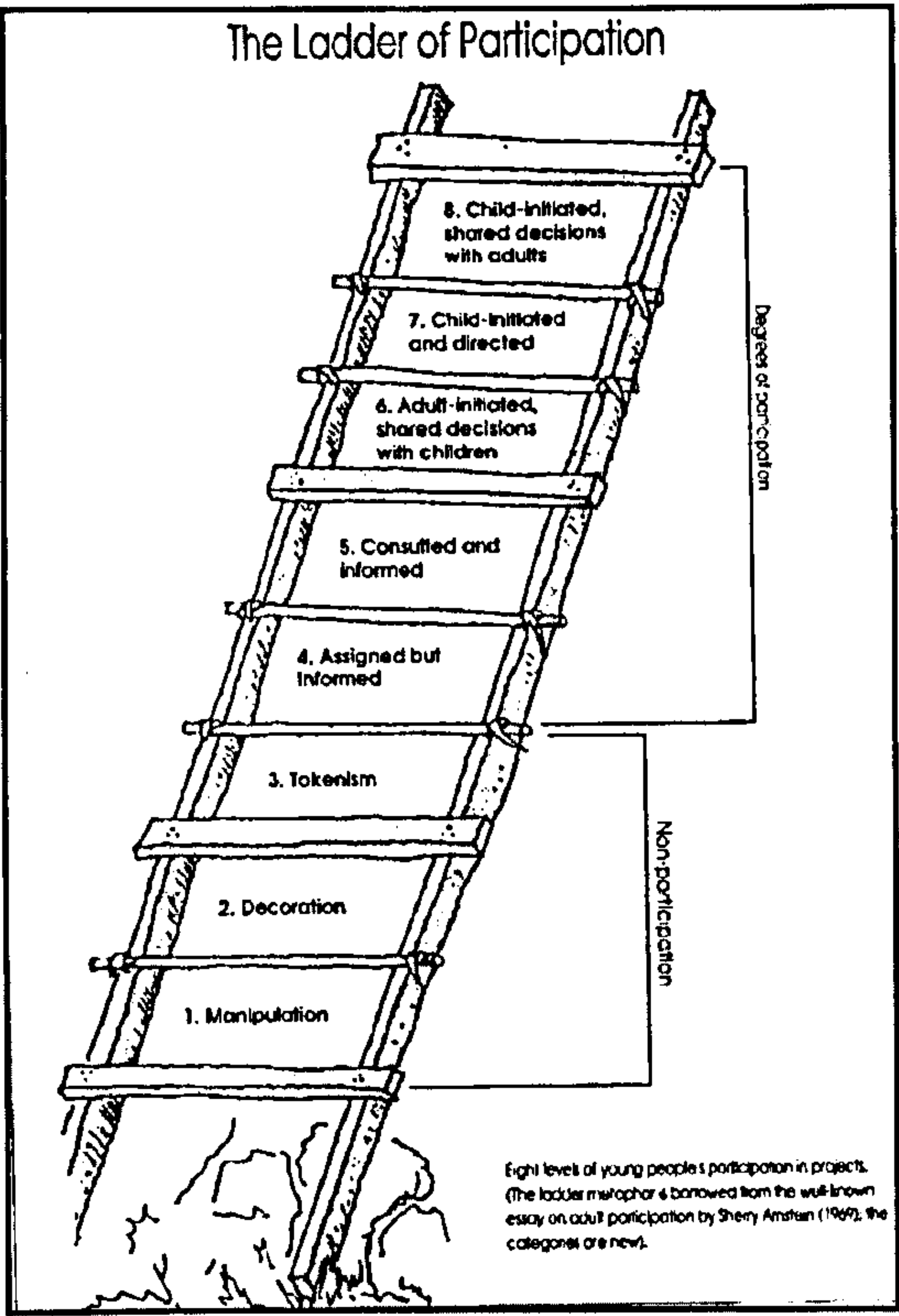
sustaining an apparently well-intentioned participation-oriented discourse, falling into a patronising attitude towards children. Expressions such as: ‘it makes sense to *permit* young people to challenge the structures of authority (...) [and] *letting* young people examine the rights *afforded* them (...)’ (Fernekas, 1992, p.203, emphasis added), in which marks of a patronising discourse can be detected, provide clear support to the above-mentioned criticism. For most authors, though, participation is conceived as a real partnership between adults and children (Hester et al., 2003; Lansdown, 2001). Some have, therefore, tried to conceptualise such partnerships by transposing them into ‘models of participation’.

#### **1.4.3.1. Models of participation**

At this point, the focus will be on models that attribute to adults, in one way or another, the role of granters of participation or that of initiators of the process. These models display mainly a hierarchical presentation, with children progressively accessing higher levels of participation. The most widely quoted amongst them is perhaps that of Hart’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ (Hart, 1992).

1.4.3.1.1. Hart’s ‘Ladder of Participation’

Figure 1.1: Hart’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ (in Hart, 1992)



The following table (Table 1.2), which is based on Hart’s (1992; 1997) description of his diagram, intends to summarise the type of attitudes and behaviours that characterise each of the rungs:



Table 1.2: Description of the rungs in Hart’s (1992; 1997) ‘Ladder of Participation’

Non-participation	1- Manipulation or Deception	Manipulation refers to instances when adults purposefully use children to promote their own agendas but children have no understanding of the issues at stake or of their own actions. Deception involves situations where adults lead others to believe that projects were entirely carried out by children, so that they have a greater impact, whereas, in reality child involvement was minimal and there was no real understanding of the project. It is said to be very common and arrive even when well-intentioned adults are involved.
	2- Decoration	Pertains to occasions where adults use children to bolster a certain cause, although there is no longer a pretension that the action was inspired by the children. Still, children have little understanding of the cause or the event and no involvement in its organisation.
	3- Tokenism	Relates to cases in which it looks like children are using their own voice, but in reality, they have little or no choice of the subjects involved and no opportunity or time to manifest their own opinion. They are used as tokens to create an impact merely through their presence.
Degrees of genuine participation	4- Assigned but informed or ‘Social Mobilisation’	It is said to represent the first rung of genuine participation. However, each project has to be analysed in a case by case basis to determine whether children are being used once again. In the appropriate circumstances, even if they did not initiate the project themselves, they: Are informed and understand its intentions; Know who conceived it and why they are involved; Have a meaningful role in it; Volunteered for the project once they had understood it and feel they own it too.
	5- Consulted and informed	Entails children working as consultants for adult-designed and adult-run projects. Hence, children understand the processes and their opinions are taken seriously.
	6- Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children	Is identified by projects in which, although initiated by adults, there is open discussion with children and the planning and designing is done in shared decision-making with them. For this rung to be attained, it is necessary that children are involved to some degree in the entire project.
	7- Child-initiated and directed	More common in the world of children’s play. It is related to the creation of supportive conditions for children to work cooperatively. The role of adults is seen as that of noticing children’s initiatives and promoting those supportive conditions but without necessarily intervening in their projects, much less controlling them or playing a directing role.
	8- Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Comprises children (generally older ones) wanting to incorporate adults into projects they have designed and managed themselves. This is considered as the highest level because it is a demonstration that the children feel competent and confident in their own role and do not need to hide their projects or deny the collaboration of others. It necessarily takes sensitive and respectful adults in order to know how to respond to children without imposing themselves.

This model is an adaptation of a pre-existing ‘ladder’ diagram conceived by Arnstein (1969, cited in Hart, 1992), which referred to adults’ participation as citizens. The rungs of the ‘ladder’ were, nonetheless, revised by Hart (1992) to fit the specificity of

children's participation, mainly in the contexts of programme designing and project development. As it can be appreciated in Figure 1.1, Hart (1992) proposes eight rungs of progressively higher levels of participation to be attained by children.

As he believes child participation is a complex phenomenon, Hart (1992) suggests that his model should be considered more as a tool for designing new participation-oriented programmes than as a simple measure of the quality of any existing ones. He argues, for instance, that it 'is not necessary that children always operate on the highest possible rungs of the ladder. (...) The important principle again is one of choice: programmes should be designed which maximize the opportunity for any child to choose to participate at the highest level of his [sic] ability' (Hart, 1992, p.12). Nonetheless, the author states that the first three rungs are not representative of children's genuine participation and should, therefore, be avoided (Hart, 1997).

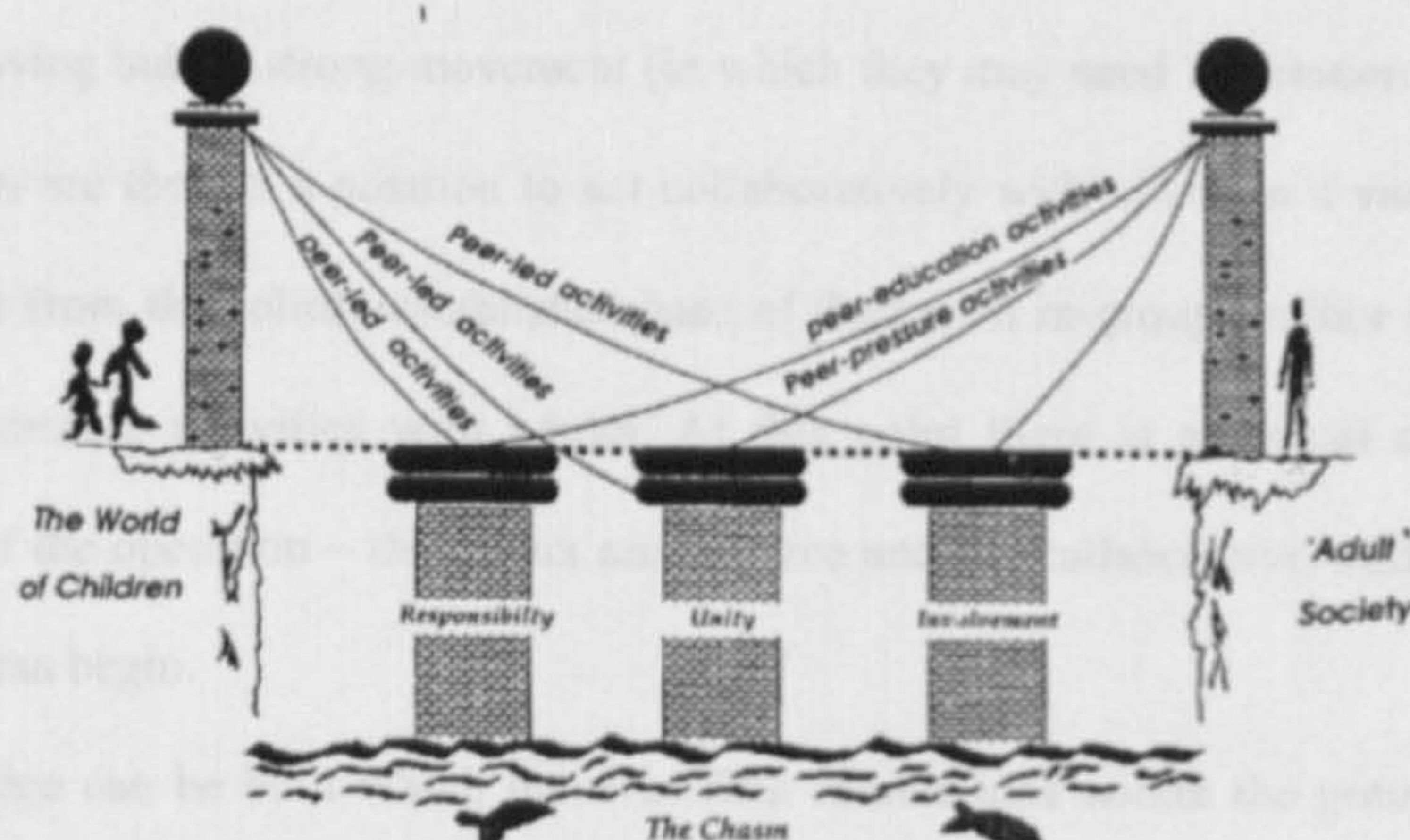
While widely quoted and used, this model has not been exempt from criticism: firstly, it has often been accused of being confusing as well as culturally biased (Pridmore, 2000). Moreover, the 'ladder' metaphor is not unanimously accepted either (John, 1996). In fact, the idea of an ascending movement for children up a 'ladder' has been criticised by some on the basis that it relegates children to a passive role and gives adults too much control over the children's access to participation. John (1996, p.15) characterises this model as one where a 'ladder is offered and the child, with various assistance from the adult, is 'empowered' to move up it into mainstream society and mainstream citizenship. (...) [In that author's opinion] this is an old model of rights which one might call the model in which rights are 'bestowed' by the powerful on the less powerful'. John (1996) considers that such an approach does not serve the children's interests, nor is it in line with contemporary thinking on their participation rights. She



suggests, therefore, that a new model for the conceptualisation of these rights is necessary.

#### 1.4.3.1.2. John's 'Bridge-Building' model

Figure 1.2: John's 'Bridge-Building' model (in John, 1996)



Unsatisfied with the existing approaches, John (1996) advocates that the conceptualisation of children's participation is in need of 'a model which is much more dynamic, which takes account of the politics of child participation [as a minority group] and which also encompasses the construction of creative alliances with adults which forms the true basis of an emotional democracy on which, it could be argued, children's participation must be based' (John, 1996, p.19). As this author views children as a minority group struggling for their right to participate and for empowerment, John (1996, p.16) suggests that children's participation models be equated to 'models emerging from the struggles of minority rights groups'. Consequently, John delineates her own model which is inspired by Biko's (1983, cited in John, 1996) writings on black consciousness. Instead of a 'ladder' metaphor, John uses rather a 'bridge-building' model based on three pre-requisites to empowerment, equivalent to those



referred by Biko: Responsibility, Unity, and Involvement (John, 1996). Her description of the ‘bridge-building’ model seems to be self-explanatory:

‘If the Responsibility [for educating others], Unity [with each member identifying with the group] and Community Action (...) were seen to be pillars to support a bridge that have to be put in place before the chasm between the world of the child and the world of the adult from which they are initially excluded in any powerful sense can be spanned, then we can see that, having built a strong movement (in which they may need facilitation and support), the children are then in a position to act collaboratively with adults in a variety of ways. They move from the solidly established base of their own in-group politics to negotiative and collaborative activities with adults. At this point there is a radical change in the character of the operation – the pillars are in place and the collaborative work of spanning the chasm can begin.

Thus a bridge can be built which involves firm foundations within the group and, for its ultimate success, the collaboration of both parties. In considering the form this collaboration might take, (...) [a set] of different types of peer partnership activities [Peer Pressure; Peer Education; Peer-led work] is helpful.’ (John, 1996, p.21).

There are certain characteristics of this model that stem directly from the ideological position in which it is inscribed. It is believed these can be better understood if John’s ‘bridge-building’ model is compared with Hart’s (1992) ‘ladder’ diagram. For that reason, the next section of this chapter will be dedicated to that comparison.

#### **1.4.3.2. Comparison between the models**

One of John’s (1996) concerns with regards to the conceptualisation of children’s participation is that any model developed needs to entail a more active role for children in the whole process than that attributed to them in Hart’s (1992) diagram. Therefore, a positive feature of her model, which suggests indeed a more active role, is that children



are seen as joining the 'adults' world' in a horizontal and collaborative fashion, rather than being brought in to it by adults, through an ascending movement, as it happens in Hart's model (1992). However, whereas Hart's ladder can be accused of holding a patronising approach, the 'bridge-building' model, on the other hand, seems to view adult-children relationships as somewhat confrontational: this can be exemplified by John's use of terminology such as 'the powerful and the oppressed', 'a peer-pressure movement', etc. Furthermore, all the emphasis is placed in the organisation of the peer movement, which apparently indicates that only collective action is viable. This can be considered as a disadvantage in relation to Hart's ladder, which can be applied to instances involving both groups and individual children.

There is also an evident disparity in terms of the intents of these models. While Hart makes clear that his 'goal is not to encourage the development of 'children's power' or to see children operate as an entirely different sector of their community' (Hart, 1997, p.45), John sees children as a minority rights group and proposes that they seek political empowerment. Furthermore, claiming participation rights for children as an effort equated to the struggle for minority's or women's rights (John, 1996; 1998; Stalford, 2000) is also a view faced with certain objections: the arguments presented by John for this comparison are that children, as a group, 'share many features of such groups – one of which has been that their own subjectivities have been denied and a second that there has been, a paucity of research on those whose voices have been, as a result of this denial, silent' (John, 1996, p.4). However, it is also legitimate to argue that, unlike the above mentioned 'minority groups', children are not *artificially* maintained in a dependent situation by societal relations: they are *effectively* dependent on adults for their own survival (Lowy, 1992).

A conciliatory position between the two views could, therefore, be proposed: while children's dependence may be a condition for their survival, it cannot be used as a reason for being denied their participation rights, 'both because all humans are dependent upon others at least some of the time and because negotiation of participation, based on respect, can very well be carried out in relation to dependent persons' (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.65). Hence, the focus is placed on the fact that there are child rearing practices which accentuate that dependence (Arnold, 2002; Dallos, 1996) while others promote progressive autonomy and participation (d'Ailly, 2003; Hart & Schwab, 1997). The granted nature of participation rights and the role of adults' attitudes are, thus, emphasised within this conciliatory view.

Finally, both models share some important features, which relate to their view of participation as a granted right. One of those features concerns their evolutionary conception of participation as a *continuum* – and not as an 'all or nothing' situation – which is translated in the existence of different stages where participation can operate. The notion of participation as a *continuum* has been further developed by Gersch (1987; 1992; 1996) and it is a very useful concept, particularly with regards to children's effective exercise of their participation rights. The latter aspect constitutes, therefore, the object of the next section.

#### **1.4.4. Participation as an exercised right**

This concept refers to the effective and active involvement of children in whatever domain being considered. Ideally, it would comprise children operating at the highest levels of the previously proposed models (Hart, 1992; John, 1996). It can also be affirmed that if, on the one hand, the previous views – i.e. of participation as an inalienable, statutory, and granted right – do not fully accomplish the purposes they



establish if participation is not translated into an exercised right, on the other hand, the view of participation as an exercised right cannot take place without their input. There is, therefore, a symbiotic relationship between the different conceptions of participation as a right for children.

This is all the more important if it is considered that the three first views can – and many times do – remain totally rhetorical or theoretical exercises, with no impact on children's effective participation. It should not be forgotten 'that the purpose is two-fold. The theoretical exercise is only one part of it, the other is to make children's rights a reality for the children of the world' (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990, p.150), and consequently, that the practical implementation of those rights should constitute the most important goal. Hence, there is a pressing need for discussion on the actual exercise of participation rights by the children themselves (Lansdown, 2001). According to Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997, p.68), research efforts should concentrate in trying 'to determine which choices and decisions children should or can make at different stages of development, what kinds of responsibility they are able to and can benefit from having and how their decision-making and responsibility-taking capacities can be encouraged, supported and enhanced' .

An on-going discussion involves, therefore, both the fora and the actual modalities in which participation might be expressed: many fora have been suggested where children's exercised participation is said to be pertinent and possible to implement. Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997, p.66-67) consider that 'when adults in any situation reflect upon the possibilities for child participation, there will be no need to look for or construct arenas'. They insist, therefore, in that what is necessary is a change in attitudes with regards to how different loci can be deemed as pertinent for the exercise

of participation rights because the arenas have been available for a long time: they just need to be viewed as appropriate loci for such an exercise and have their potential explored accordingly. As is pointed out in the literature, these loci may encompass, for instance:

Table 1.3: Suggested loci for children’s exercise of participation

<input type="checkbox"/>	Conferences (Miljeteig-Olsen, 1992)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Family (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Manke, Seery, Crouter, & McHale, 1994; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997)
<input type="checkbox"/>	School (Fernekkes, 1992; Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Holden & Clough, 1998; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Community (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Holden & Clough, 1998; Nader, 1992)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tribunals (Taylor, 1998)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Town councils (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Lücker-Babel, 1995)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clubs and religious organisations (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Heath education (Pridmore, 2000)

In their specificity, these fora will be the object of the three following chapters. Lansdown (2001, p.16) proposes, however, that regardless of any specific forum, participatory initiatives with children can be summed up in three modalities, which are not mutually exclusive nor static:

- ‘*Consultative processes* – in which adults initiate processes to obtain information from children through which they can improve legislation, policies or services;
- Participative initiatives* – where the aim is to strengthen processes of democracy, create opportunities for children to understand and apply democratic principles or involve children in the development of services and policies that impact on them;
- Promoting self advocacy* – where the aim is to empower children to identify and fulfil their own goals and initiatives’.

There are also multiple discussions about what this genuine exercised participation should look like and what elements it should encompass. For the purposes of this



definition, however, Lansdown's (2001, pp.9-10) principles regarding activities developed with and by children will be used:

- 'Children must understand what the project or the process is about, what it is for and their role within it;
- Power relations and decision-making structures must be transparent;
- Children should be involved from the earliest possible stage of any initiative;
- All children should be treated with equal respect regardless of their age, situation, ethnicity, abilities or other factors;
- Ground rules should be established with all the children at the beginning;
- Participation should be voluntary and children should be allowed to leave at any stage;
- Children are entitled to respect for their views and experience.'

Along the same lines, one of the more recently developed concepts with regards to exercised participation – which intends to represent its ultimate expression – is that of children's 'protagonistic' participation (Aguilar, Aussems & Blondiau, 2001; Cussiánovich, 2001). This neologism conveys the sense of 'participation as an identity project'. It intends that 'all, and children in particular, may become the protagonists of their life and their personal and social history. Being a protagonist of one's own life means to be a subject and not an object, it implies a level of autonomy and responsibility in the exercise of our liberty and is at the heart of our dignity as persons' (Cussiánovich, 2001, p.2, translated).

### **1.5. Conclusion and presentation of a framework: participation at macro-, meso- and micro-levels**

This chapter presented and defined four views on the right to participation: i.e. participation as an inalienable, statutory, granted and exercised right. Recent trends in

literature indicate that much has been written about the two first views of the right to participation – inalienable and statutory – but that, ultimately, those remain abstract views, which might never be translated into practice for children (Aguilar, Aussems & Blondiau, 2001). Therefore, some authors claim that the focus of investigation should be put in the granted and exercised rights of participation for children (Melton, 1996; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997).

This will be the object of the present study: the main purpose is to seek and propose an identification of granted and exercised participation in the educational process of primary school children. Simultaneously, the intention is to discuss what factors determine, or in any way influence, that participation. Towards that purpose, this review of literature will now propose a framework encompassing seven levels at which participation can take place and will analyse how the translation of the inalienable right view into the statutory, granted and exercised has been or should be performed in each of those levels.

At the early stages of the review it has become clear that the fora being illustrated in the literature were also multiple. In fact, if any individual child is placed at the centre of the framework, as its focal point, it could be considered that there are macro-, meso- and micro- levels of interpretation of the phenomenon. In order to organise the information pertaining to those different loci, the seven level framework was devised as encompassing macro, meso, and micro stances. Although recognising that other types of organisation might be valid, this framework – which is loosely based on the one proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) – was devised taking into consideration that the phenomenon studied in this piece of research is participation in education.



This is the proposed articulation of the four views with those created levels, which will be explored in the following chapters:

Table 1.4: Articulation between views of participation and levels of analysis

'Inalienable right' view						
MACRO		MESO		MICRO		
International	European	National	Regional	Local (school)	Classroom	Individual
Statutory		Statutory		Statutory		
		Granted & Exercised		Granted & Exercised		
Granted & Exercised				Empirical study		

As it can be appreciated in table 1.4, the ‘inalienable right’ view is seen as the primary source for the other views: statutory, granted and exercised. It remains, therefore, above the framework and the other views, at a theoretical level, while simultaneously shedding its influence upon the pragmatic levels (macro, meso and micro).

In the framework as well as in the thesis, the macro dimension will encompass an International and an European level. The statutory view at these levels is constituted by legal instruments that are far-reaching and possess a wide scope of action. These include, for instance, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties; the European Strategy for Children; the European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights; or the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Moreover, these documents and the view of participation they present – especially the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – have been the object of most writings in



the field of child participation at these levels, thus justifying the predominance of the statutory view in the framework.

It is proposed, therefore, that these two levels attend to participation rights mainly through a statutory view and that the fora they encompass – e.g. international UN conferences – do not hold most appropriate conditions for the development of granted and exercised rights. This justifies the imbalance between the different views presented in table 1.4. These levels and the view of participation rights they portray will be discussed in chapter 2.

The meso dimension of the framework includes both National and Regional levels. These aspects will be presented and discussed in chapter 3. As seen in the table, the roles attributed to the statutory view, on the one hand and, on the other hand, to granted and exercised views appear to be more balanced at these levels: the statutory dimension will be represented within this thesis by the legal mechanisms put in place in different countries – namely within the European Union – that focus on participation rights. It is also suggested that the fora encompassed at these levels – e.g. participation in local government structures – are slightly more appropriate for the development of granted and exercised views than those present at the macro-level. This explains the apparently more balanced situation between the different views (table 1.4). However, for reasons that will be discussed in chapter 3, the National and Regional fora do not yet seem to comprise the best conditions for the achievement of high levels of granted and exercised participation.

It should not be forgotten that the main goal of this thesis is to discuss how participation can become a right exercised by children. This entails the need for loci where granted



and exercised participation can be both researched and where there are potentially optimal conditions for its pragmatic implantation. A case will, therefore, be made for the importance of the micro processes, which include the Local (school), Classroom and Individual levels. These levels will be addressed in chapter 4. As it can be seen in the table, it will be argued that these levels' fora hold great potential to achieve both goals, i.e. the investigation and the development of granted and exercised participation. This motivates the predominance of these two views in the framework, in detriment of the statutory view, which, as will be seen in chapter 4, is judged to play a weaker role at these levels.

For the same reasons the micro-levels will also constitute the object of the empirical study (chapters 5 to 8), as indicated in the framework. The importance of factors or filters, present at all the levels, which shape the way the right to participation is interpreted at each of them is also discussed in the following chapters.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Participation at the macro-levels: International / European**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

Having presented the different views on children's right to participation, this review now proceeds to explore their articulation with the seven-level framework that was devised. Accordingly, the first elements discussed will be the views of participation at the macro – International and European – levels. It can be affirmed that, at these levels, much has been written about the previously described 'statutory' right to participation, particularly over the last decade. In fact, most writings found in the area of child participation focus on the 'statutory' aspect of the right, which demonstrates its prevalence as a current object of concern. Many would say, however, that this insistence upon the socio-legal aspects of the right to participation is often accomplished in detriment of 'granted' and 'exercised' perspectives (Jupp, 1990; Saks, 1996). As will be seen, the explanation for this imbalance is also intimately related with the nature of the fora where participation takes place at these levels: in fact, some question the appropriateness and pertinence of these loci for the exercise of children's effective participation (e.g. Hart & Schwab, 1997).

It can, furthermore, be argued that because the 'statutory' view constitutes such a large part of the existing literature on participation, this review could not neglect it. Therefore, some of the most widely quoted International and European legal instruments in this area – as well as the portrait of participation they present – will be analysed in this section. The perspective assumed, however, is not legalistic but psycho-educational: the objective of such an analysis is mainly to appreciate the attitudes



conveyed in those instruments regarding, among others, the loci in which participation is conceived as pertinent and their link with children's developmental aspects. Furthermore, it is to explain and criticise those perceptions, namely in comparison with an 'inalienable right' view of participation. The end of the chapter encompasses a brief description of the 'granted' and 'exercised' views, of the modalities they assume as well as the debate on their adequacy at these levels.

## **2.2. Statutory right at the macro-levels**

### **2.2.1. Statutory right at International level**

At the International level, an unquestionable landmark in the domain of child participation as a statutory right is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989). This children's rights' instrument, hereafter designated as 'UN Convention', encompasses a wide range of principles, addressing multiple spheres of children's lives, which were, for the first time, combined in a single legally binding document (Edmonds, 1992; Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). The significance of these dispositions in the context of international law has been such, that the UN Convention has even been called the 'Magna Carta' of children's rights (Davidson, 1990, cited in Murphy-Berman, Levesque & Berman, 1996). For that reason, and because of its wide and comprehensive scope (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Cantwell, 1992; Sinclair-Taylor, 2000) this section of the literature review will start by providing an analysis of the UN Convention's content and the view of participation that it offers. It will, thus, begin with a brief presentation of how the notion of participation as a 'statutory' right emerged and evolved within the larger context of the development of international children's rights instruments.

### **2.2.1.1. The evolution of children's rights instruments and the emergence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

As an introduction to this aspect, it should be mentioned that, historically, children have not been considered as a group having particular characteristics or different needs from the rest of humanity (Freeman, 1998). Therefore, provisions regarding their rights were said to be either subsumed under general human rights instruments – such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Verhellen, 1993) – or diluted in other documents concerning, for instance, family or educational matters (Stalford, 2000). Nevertheless, in the beginning of the twentieth century, ‘the reality of reports from all over the world indicating that children indeed needed special rights because of their vulnerability’ (Hammarberg, 1990, p. 99), became a strong argument in favour of providing them with a separate set of rights. Yet, this separate set of rights – which culminated in the UN Convention – was not formulated as such from the very beginning: instead, it seems to have been an ideal which evolved and gained expression throughout the course of the century (Black, 1996).

In fact, one can argue that ‘the evolution of special rights for children took place alongside that of general human rights, and followed a fairly typical course for the development of international standards: the formulation of basic ideas promulgated in the form of a declaration, the gradual introduction of some of those ideas into binding and nonbinding international texts of wider scope, and the bringing together and updating of the resulting body of pertinent standards in a full-fledged convention’ (Cantwell, 1992, p.207).



The following table (Table 2.1) derives from the writings of Black (1996); Cantwell (1992, pp.207-208); Hammarberg (1990); Jupp (1990); Miljeteig-Olssen (1990); UNICEF (1990a; 1997, pp.66-67) and Verhellen (1993) and intends to illustrate that evolution. It addresses international instruments pertaining to child protection and children's rights, from the very first – which, perhaps as a reflection of their time, focused on children's working conditions – until the appearance of the binding UN Convention, in 1989:

Table 2.1: International instruments pertaining to children's rights and protection

YEAR	DOCUMENT
1919	<b>Minimum age (industry) Convention No. 5</b> Sets 14 years as the minimum age for children to be employed in industry. Adopted at the first session of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Ratified by 72 nations (UNICEF, 1997).
1923	Marks the 'first time that the idea that children everywhere should have special rights' was considered (...) 'The council of the Save the Children International Union adopted a <b>five-point Declaration of the Rights of the Child</b> , setting out basic welfare and protection principles' (Cantwell, 1992).
1924	'The Assembly of the League of Nations passed a resolution endorsing the above mentioned declaration and invited its members to follow its principles' (Cantwell, 1992; Verhellen, 1993).
1930	<b>ILO forced labour Convention No. 29</b> Provides for the suppression of all forms of 'forced or compulsory labour,' meaning any work or service exacted involuntarily and under threat of penalty. Ratified by 139 nations as of mid-September 1996 (UNICEF, 1997).
1948	'The newly constituted United Nations adopted a slightly expanded version of the 1923 Declaration containing seven principles.' (Cantwell, 1992)
1959 (20 <sup>th</sup> November)	United Nations General Assembly 'promulgated a <b>ten-point declaration [on Children's Rights]</b> , which served as a springboard for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is still valid today' (Cantwell, 1992; Hammarberg, 1990).
1966	<b>International Covenant on Economic, Social &amp; Cultural Rights</b> Article 10 enjoins nations to protect young people from economic exploitation and employment harmful to their morals, health, or lives, or likely to hamper their normal development. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966, and entered into force in 1976. Ratified by 135 nations as of mid-September 1996 (UNICEF, 1997).
1973	<b>ILO Minimum Age Convention No.138</b> Sets the minimum age for work in any economic sector as not less than the age for completing compulsory education — and not less than 15 years. The minimum age for work likely to jeopardize health, safety, or morals is 18 years. Ratified by 49 nations as of mid-September 1996 (UNICEF, 1997).
1976	<b>ILO Minimum Age Recommendation No. 146</b> Calls on nations to raise the minimum age of employment to 16 years (UNICEF, 1997).
1978	'The government of Poland, one of the declaration's proponents in 1959, launched the initiative [of considering setting out children's rights in the form of a convention] on the eve of the International Year of the Child' (Cantwell, 1992).
1979	<b>International Year of the Child.</b> 'By putting forward a draft based upon principles already unanimously agreed upon, [the first text proposed was very close to the 1959 declaration (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990)], Poland believed that agreement and adoption might be secured quickly. This was not to be, however.' (Black, 1996; Cantwell, 1992; Jupp, 1990; Verhellen, 1993).
1989 (20 <sup>th</sup> November)	<b>Convention on the Rights of the Child</b> is adopted in the '(...) symbolic year of 1989 (the thirtieth anniversary of the declaration and the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Child)' (Cantwell, 1992; UNICEF, 1997).



Through the analysis of table 2.1 it can be argued that 'far from constituting a sudden revolution, the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are essentially the logical outcome of a continuous process of experience gathering and reflection over several decades' (Cantwell, 1992, p.207). It can also be noticed that the actual process leading to the adoption of the UN Convention began as early as 1979, around a draft document issued by Poland. In fact, 'deeply affected by the murder of over two million Polish children and the persecution of many more during the Nazi regime, the Polish government had for years been advocating that the U.N. adopt a legally binding instrument to promote children's rights' (LeBlanc, 1995). Therefore, Poland presented a proposal, which was very closely based on the 1959 Declaration, and suggested its adoption as a legally binding Convention (Murphy-Berman & Weisz, 1996). 'Some of the countries represented at the United Nations, however, felt that the Polish proposal was incomplete and did not necessarily reflect the needs of the developing countries. The United Nations response was to refer the Polish draft to an open-ended working group of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for redrafting' (Jupp, 1990, p.134). For that reason, although the drafting process of the UN Convention was to take ten years, the way in which that process took place was very innovative (Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Jupp, 1990): for the first time in the history of UN law-making, there were yearly meetings gathering representatives from all over the world in order to discuss the content of the future UN Convention (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990; Murphy-Berman, Levesque & Berman, 1996).

Still, the composition of the drafting team, as well as its overall approach, were sometimes questioned on the basis of being too westernised and there were fears that many nations would not identify with the views being proposed (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990). That said, on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1989, the UN General



Assembly (1989) unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention came into force less than a year later, on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1990, thirty days after it had been ratified by more than twenty nations, as prescribed by UN legislation (Cohen, Hart & Kosloske, 1992; Cohen & Naimark, 1991).

Several landmarks in the history of UN law-making have been established by this document: firstly, it is the international human rights instrument that has come into force in the shortest period of time ever registered (Cantwell, 1992; Wilcox & Naimark, 1991); secondly, apart from the United States – which has signed, but not ratified – and Somalia – which is currently lacking a legitimate government – all of the world's nations have ratified the UN Convention (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1993; Schabas, 1996). This fact has also made this instrument the most widespread human rights treaty ever (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Kilkelly, 2001).

In previous children's rights instruments, such as the 1959 Declaration, a country's signature only meant an agreement with its stated principles (Cantwell, 1992; Hammarberg, 1990) as well as a moral engagement to comply (Verhellen, 1993). However, by ratifying the UN Convention, states-parties agree that its provisions become legally binding in their jurisdiction (Balton, 1990; Edmonds, 1992).

Still, it can be argued – notwithstanding the polemic that can be raised by such affirmation – that this document represents the closest that humanity has ever come to a worldwide agreement (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1992) on a *new and common basis* for considering children and childhood (Casas, 1997; Hart & Schwab, 1997). This phrase – 'new and common basis' – requires, nonetheless, some clarification.

*A common basis:* Assumptions of a universal view of rights are necessarily difficult to uphold, considering the evident cultural diversity amongst the world's nations and their points of view (Lopatka, 1992; Harris-Short, 2003). This aspect was actually patent during the drafting process (Osler, 1998): it has been stated that 'participants in the drafting process, operating without a common legal perspective or philosophical basis, were faced with the necessity of creating their own concept of children's rights' (Cohen & Naimark, 1991, p.61). The fact that virtually all the countries in the world have ratified the UN Convention gains strength, therefore, as a sign that there is at least an elementary common agreement between the states-parties with regards to the rights it encompasses (Edmonds, 1992). Nonetheless, the fact that they were able to reach an agreement with respect to *formulations* of rights does not necessarily imply that all signatory countries share 'a unanimous *understanding* of what the concept of children's rights implies' (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990, p.150, emphasis added). It should, in fact, be mentioned that, even if there was worldwide ratification, not all countries have adopted this instrument unreservedly: seventy nations have ratified the Convention while expressing some sort of reservation to its text (Langevin-Falcon, 1998).

*A new basis:* One of the most innovative aspects brought by this instrument is, according to Andrews and Freeman (1997, p.9), that 'the Convention pertains to each child, not children as a class'. This view is shared by Cohen and Naimark (1991, p.60) who stress that 'although the breadth of the Convention's protection is exceptional, what is especially interesting and innovative is the ultimate picture that the text draws of the child as an individual'. The conception presented in the UN Convention is, then, seen as challenging 'traditional' views of children, as well as of their place and role in society (Edelman & Sabom, 2001). In fact, 'the principles contained in the Convention express a powerful view of the child not only as a member of a family but as a unique



individual' (Wilcox & Naimark, 1991, p.49) and – for the first time in history – as a citizen (Verhellen, 1993). This aspect becomes all the more important because it implies that, through ratification, the states-parties not only engage themselves in improving their own country's situation regarding the rights of children as a group, but also that they hold a commitment towards each individual child (Andrews & Freeman, 1997).

Having briefly addressed the drafting process of the UN Convention and its main innovations, the review now proceeds to the presentation of its contents, namely in what regards participation rights.

#### **2.2.1.2. Contents of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The text of the UN Convention is composed of three parts. It starts with the *preamble*, which states this document's guiding principles and situates it with regards to some of the above mentioned international rights instruments (see table 2.1).

Following the preamble, there is the so-called *substantive section* (containing 41 articles), which spells out the goals to be attained and the effective rights granted to children under the UN Convention. The rights defined are non-hierarchical and encompass civic, political, economic, social and cultural entitlements.

Finally, the third part is known as the *procedural section* and it is considered as one of the innovative aspects of this instrument. In its 12 articles, it addresses the enforcement procedures and the processes through which the outcome goals can be achieved. It proposes, namely, the creation of a committee to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention in the various states-parties. This aspect will be discussed later (namely in

chapter 3). This general description of the UN Convention was based on Cohen and Naimark (1991); Hammarberg (1990); Murphy-Berman, Levesque and Berman (1996).

More specifically, it can be said that the UN Convention contains four main principles that should be described as the axes that cut across the whole document and maintain its cohesion. They constitute the underlying structure around which the UN Convention was built and should always serve as a reference when interpreting each of its 54 articles. These principles are (Sinclair-Taylor, 2000):

- a) Non-discrimination;
- b) Best interest of the child;
- c) Right to life, survival and development;
- d) Respect for the views of the child.

If a) and c) are fairly ‘classic’, traditionally undisputed principles, being in consonance with previous children’s rights instruments, b) and d) have been regarded as innovations, specific to this document and have, hence, generated more polemic and passionate debate (John, 1998). In what concerns b), ‘the best interest of the child’ – i.e. the principle that the child’s well-being, at all levels, should supersede any measures involving the child (Wolf, 1992; Wolfson, 1992) – has been criticised on the basis that, as a principle, this notion may be highly culturally biased (Burman, 2003). As Eekelaar (1994, p.57) advances: ‘conceptions of children’s best interests are strongly rooted in the self-images of world cultures. These objectivizations of children’s interests will inevitably largely constitute the way the ‘principle’ is viewed in those cultures’. Another potential problem regarding this principle – which is also related to the fact that the UN Convention addresses each child as an individual – is that it embraces the notion



that the child's interests may be different from, or even opposed to, those of his / her family (Burman, 2003). This notion is arguably not in line with many states' parties conceptions of the roles of children and families (Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Freeman, 1992a).

The concept of 'child's best interest' does, in itself, constitute an interesting object of research, which would eventually require a more detailed discussion. Although the review acknowledges this concept and will make reference to it where appropriate, exploring it any further would exceed the scope of this review. This analysis will, therefore, proceed to focus on the principle which is the object of the thesis, that of participation.

#### **2.2.1.3. The participation axis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The UN Convention is said to guarantee to children, for the first time in a legally binding form, the so-called three *P*'s (Edmonds, 1992; Hammarberg, 1990; John, 1998; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1992): '*Provision* (food, medical care, education, etc.), *Protection* (from child labour, adult abuse, under the law, etc.) and *Participation*' (John, 1996, p.5, emphasis added). It is, thus, a very comprehensive document (Kilkelly, 2001; Verhellen, 1993). Once again, it can be argued that *provision* and *protection* fall within the more 'classic' groups of rights, which were already present in previous instruments (Hammarberg, 1997). As Cantwell (1992, p.209) observes:

'A look at the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child shows that it contains principles concerning provision and protection, but there is no sign whatsoever of the third *P* — participation. In that declaration, children were not recognized as having the right to do or say anything — they were simply to be provided with certain things or services (e.g. name

and nationality, health care, and education) and to be protected from certain acts (e.g. abuse and exploitation)'.

The UN Convention enshrines, then, an innovative axis – that of participation – which demonstrates a shift in the traditional image provided of children (Verhellen, 1992) and in the understanding of their entitlements (Verhellen, 1993). For this reason, the participation axis has been called ‘the most challenging aspect of the Articles of the Convention’ (John, 1998, p.9) as well as its ‘most controversial group of rights’ (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1992, p.216). On the one hand, the controversy may be caused ‘in part because the ways to exercise or fulfil these rights are not as immediately obvious nor as simple to evaluate as other rights’ (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.61). On the other hand, the reasons for this concern may be linked with the fact that the participation axis of the Convention proposes that children ‘become subjects, rather than the objects, of their rights’ (Cantwell, 1992, p.208; as well as Freeman, 1992b; 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997). As mentioned above, and as Andrews and Freeman (1997, p.11) also point out: ‘many nations are concerned these sections of the *Convention* threaten the control that parents and society seek to maintain over children’. It has been argued that this fear of parental disempowerment finds its origins in ways of conceiving childhood which differ from those spelled out in the UN Convention (Duffy et al., 2002; Walker, 2001). Yet, many affirm that it is a false issue, raised by anti-Convention lobbyists and that parental disempowerment is never advocated in any way by the UN Convention (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Hart & Schwab, 1997). They argue that, on the contrary, this instrument supports family environment and parents, which are seen as supporters and advisors of children (Cantwell, 1992; Melton, 1996). Still, according to these authors, the UN Convention does not support an authoritarian view of parenthood, where children have no say in what happens in their lives (Andrews & Freeman, 1997).



Furthermore, this criticism is made under the assumption that parental action will instinctively and consistently be benign for the child, which is known not to be the case in many families (Stalford, 2000). Therefore, the formulation used in the UN Convention is seen as positive in that it encompasses both views: on the one hand, by recognising individual rights to each child – independent from those of his / her family – it covers the right to protection from parental abuse; on the other hand, it responds to the criticism which states that, because of their immaturity, children might not foresee the consequences of their actions and make choices that would be harmful to them, hence needing adult intervention (Lowy, 1992). The answer to this criticism resides both in the supporting role attributed to adults and in the fact that none of the articles is to be interpreted on its own (Verhellen, 1993), but within a framework where *protection*, *provision* and *participation* are inevitably linked and where the child's best interest is of paramount importance (Balton, 1992; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). In fact, as Melton (1996, p.1235) ascertains, somewhat humorously:

‘The drafters did not limit their statement of the rights of the child to either autonomy and privacy on the one hand (the kiddie libber agenda) or nurturance and protection on the other (the child saver agenda). Rather, they concerned themselves with defining rights in terms of their meaning for children's sense of dignity and their developing participation (...)’.

The object of the following section is to present how this right to participation is actually formulated in the UN Convention.

#### **2.2.1.4. Article 12**

If participation can be seen as an axis which extends across the whole UN Convention (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1992), it is more specifically expressed in articles 12 to 16, which

address the so-called 'civil rights of the child' (Pridmore, 2000; Verhellen, 1993). Article 12, in particular, is widely mentioned as the one that epitomises the essence of participation portrayed by the UN Convention (Kilkelly, 1999; Lücker-Babel, 1995).

This article states that:

'1. States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law' (UN General Assembly, 1989).

Andrews and Freeman (1997) and Lücker-Babel (1995), in particular (who has written extensively on the interpretation of Article 12) insist on the need to carefully examine the elements that compose this article, if a view of a world-negotiated statutory right to participation is to emerge. Indeed, it can be affirmed that 'despite the fact that it appears simple, Article 12 is not however exempt from complexities. Its strength stands in as much in its innovating aspects as in the terms used when translating it into the language of the treaty. Hence the need arises for a thorough analysis of this right to outline its real and precise nature, to delineate its content and to envisage the reforms that should be carried out at the national level' (Lücker-Babel, 1995, p.392).

This thorough analysis is the object of the present section. Although there are many implications stemming from the individual aspects that compose this article, it is believed that three specific elements are particularly useful when analysing the views portrayed by the statutory measures regarding the right to participation for children at



this level. These three elements, which were formulated for the purpose of this review, will henceforth be designated as:

2.2.1.4.1. *The context element*, which refers to the fora judged adequate for participation to be exercised;

2.2.1.4.2. *The content element*, which refers to how the right is operationalised;

2.2.1.4.3. *The competence element*, which refers to the criteria used to define the beneficiaries of the right.

#### **2.2.1.4.1. The context element**

The contexts or loci in which the application of this article is considered as pertinent are represented by the phrases ‘any judicial and administrative proceedings’ and ‘all matters affecting the child’. The context of ‘judicial proceedings’ is the only *specific* locus in which child participation is granted under the UN Convention. The expressions ‘administrative proceedings’ and ‘all matters’ are, hence, supposed to cover any other fora (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999; Lücker-Babel, 1995). It has been mentioned that this formulation was adopted with the intention of not imposing limitations to these rights (Freeman, 1992c). In fact:

‘When the drafting group first discussed the right of the child to express views, the first formulation used was ‘to make his or her views heard in issues which personally concern him or her, namely in what regards marriage, the choice of a profession, medical care, education and hobbies’. But the majority of the delegations considered that the issues on which the states parties allowed children to express their views ‘should not be limited to the issues appearing in an enumeration, and that, consequently, this enumeration should be suppressed’ (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999, p.154, translated).

It is believed, however, that such a decision carried major consequences with regards to the applicability and interpretation of this right. In fact, it can be argued that a formulation along the lines of the first draft – phrased, necessarily, in a non-restrictive manner – would perhaps have been more useful in clearly indicating to the states-parties the fields in which child participation is considered as fundamental and where the exercise of such rights could not be neglected.

As it stands today, it is undeniable that the formulation of participation rights in the UN Convention is quite vague (Balton, 1992; Hammarberg, 1990; Hojat, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997). This vagueness has inevitably given rise to multiple interpretations of this article, with different analysts portraying it according to their own views on the subject (Kaufman & Flekkøy, 1998). It is also believed that such a vagueness leaves the door open for the countries utilising the right as they see fit (Killerby, 1995), which means that areas that were initially conceived as essential – such as education (Simon, 1999; Van Bueren, 1992) – might, in the end and in practice, be excluded from that interpretation.

Still, it is true that some see in this article a clear claim that children should participate in a variety of fora (Lücker-Babel, 1995; John, 1998). On the other hand, considering the current formulation, others go as far as affirming that participation is never mentioned as an explicit right in the UN Convention (Cussiánovich, 2001). They believe, in fact, that any interpretations to the effect that participation is a right awarded by the UN Convention are only but inferences.

It is clear that ‘sometimes, constructive ambiguity is helpful in drafting conventions, treaties, and other laws (...). On the other hand, the more loosely these concepts are



defined, the more difficult and meaningless any effort [for instance] to measure them will be. Moreover, as lawyers and judges know only too well, even if there is universal agreement on what terms mean at a conceptual level, concrete situations will present challenges to the proper application of the concepts' (Saks, 1996, p.1263). It is believed this is the case in what concerns the formulation of participation rights presented in Article 12.

It should not be forgotten, though, that the UN Convention is not framed as an isolated instrument nor does it float within a legal vacuum: the UN have produced directives for interpretation (e.g. Hodgkin & Newell, 1999; Lansdown, 2001) and many analysts (e.g. John, 1998; Pridmore, 2000) have also expressed their opinions as to how this article should be interpreted. In fact, these sources consider that Article 12 is applicable to many fora, which directly or indirectly, involve children.

As mentioned above, 'judicial hearings' are the more obvious type of forum as they are explicitly mentioned in the article (Taylor, 1998). Yet, other contexts are said to fall under the scope of the expressions 'all matters affecting the child' and 'administrative proceedings': these include loci such as the family (Melton, 1996; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997), health and mental health decisions (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Walker, 2001), the community (Holden & Clough, 1998; Nader, 1992) or the environment (Hart, 1997; Hodgkin & Newell, 1999).

Education has also been one of the fields considered as relevant for the application of children's right to participation as purported in Article 12 (e.g. Balton, 1992; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1992; Sinclair-Taylor, 2000). In fact, some are quite categorical in affirming that this article applies unequivocally to the field of Education. That is the case of

Hodgkin and Newell who argue that ‘the two paragraphs of article 12 are applied (...) [to education]: the child’s general right to freely express its opinion ‘in all matters affecting’ him / her – *which covers all the aspects of its school life and the decisions regarding its education* – and the possibility of being heard in ‘any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting him / her’. These ‘administrative procedures’ *may* include the choice of school, the expelling of the pupil, the assessments, etc.’ (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999, p.164, translated, emphasis added). Although this interpretation is tenable, it constitutes no less and no more than an interpretation. For that reason, it is believed not to have the strength it might have had, were education explicitly referred in the Convention’s article.

Finally, and with regards to the applicability of these aspects to education, Hodgkin and Newell (1999, p.164, translated) claim the need ‘to dispose of a legal frame, as well as proceedings encompassing the consultation with pupils as a group, which would get to know and to respect children’s individual opinions about the educational decisions that affect them personally’. Following the reasoning described above, it can be affirmed that this ‘legal frame’ might also have been further developed in the UN Convention.

#### **2.2.1.4.2. The content element**

The content element is represented in Article 12 by the expressions a ‘right to express views freely’ and to those ‘views being given due weight’, as well as being ‘provided the opportunity to be heard’. As Lansdown (2001) argues, it is very important to clarify exactly what these phrases *do* and *do not* say. In the view of many (e.g. Hodgkin & Newell, 1999; Lansdown, 2001) this is an article that awards to the child the right to participate in decision-making, to express views freely, and that urges the states-parties



to put in place the mechanisms which will give the child the possibility of being heard. According to those authors, the article should never be interpreted as implying anything more or anything less than what is explicitly stated.

This argument gains particular relevance when considering the criticism that is often pointed at the participation aspects of the UN Convention, notably with respect to its potential for parental disempowerment (Duffy et al., 2002; Walker, 2001) or to the idea that children are too immature or vulnerable to make their own decisions (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Melton, 1996). For some, it is important to clarify that this article does not give children the right to self-determination (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999), nor ‘the right to autonomy, (...) [nor] the right to control over all decisions irrespective of their implications either for themselves or others, (...) [nor does it] give children the right to ride roughshod over the rights of their parents’ (Lansdown, 2001, p.2). It can, hence, be argued that, at least from the point of view supported by these authors, adults need not fear these provisions, nor perceive them as disempowering. Still, ‘Article 12 imposes an obligation on adults (...) to ensure that children are enabled and encouraged to contribute their views on all relevant matters’ (Lansdown, 2001, p.2).

Yet, it must be noted as well that this particular provision does not *force* or *oblige* children to express their opinion either: just as would happen with an adult, ‘if they are not willing or interested in doing so’ (Lansdown, 2001, p.2), it would be inappropriate on the part of any person or institution, e.g. a tribunal, to ‘demand from the child that he / she expresses an opinion. (...) ‘Freely’ means without coercion nor constraint in one way or the other’ (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999, p.154, translated).

#### 2.2.1.4.3. The competence element

One characteristic of the statutory view, in which it differs from that of an ‘inalienable right’ view, is that access to the right to participation is herein limited by an *a priori* inference of competence or capacity (Casas, 1997; Verhellen, 1993), i.e. what was described in the preceding chapter as a ‘pseudo-competence’ approach. In the present case, that element is translated into the expressions ‘the child who is capable of forming views’ and the child’s views ‘being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity’. Although being less restrictive than other previous documents, in not setting a specific age from which the child can benefit from this right (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999), this formulation raises some issues in what concerns the enjoyment of the right both by young children (Lansdown, 2001) and by children designated as having SEN (Davis & Watson, 2000; Jones & Marks, 1997; Weisz & Tomkins, 1996). In fact, if one does not assume the right to participation as being universal – as defined by the ‘inalienable right’ view – but only as accessible to those children deemed capable on the basis of developmental criteria, such as age and maturity, one issue that emerges, is that of how and by whom such competence or capability is going to be judged (Casas, 1997; Thomas & O’Kane, 1998).

It has been mentioned before, that competence is not an ‘all or nothing’ process (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.68) nor does it ‘develop uniformly according to rigid developmental stages. The social context, the nature of the decision, the particular life experience of the child and the level of adult support will all affect the capacity of a child to understand the issues affecting them’ (Lansdown, 2001, pp.2-3). This questions the fact that competence can be automatically inferred from variables such as chronological age or SEN.



As formulated in Article 12, a motive for concern is, hence, that it might have set a precedent for the establishment of national or local limitations to this right based on age or other developmental factors. Consequently, Lücker-Babel (1995, p.397) affirms that ‘an extensive attitude on the child’s capacity to give his or her opinion is required if we want to maintain the dynamics of Article 12 of the Convention and to avoid the exclusion of a whole category of minors. This conclusion is important, especially in relation to several national laws which often establish [for instance] the obligation for the judge to listen to the child only at specific ages’. Furthermore, under the current formulation, it is legitimate to raise the question of whether the opinion of a younger child is automatically going to be given less weight (Lansdown, 2001) or whether ‘the views of certain disabled children’ (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999, p.153) will not be taken into account, due, for instance, to difficulties in communication.

Once again, there are numerous interpretations of this aspect. The prevailing position (Lansdown, 2001; Lücker-Babel, 1995) is, nonetheless, somewhat similar to that established by the ‘inalienable right’ view: it argues that the child’s opinion should be sought, even if the intervention of specialists or the use of specific technologies or materials is necessary (Allan, 1999). Hodgkin and Newell (1999) agree with that position in what refers to the interpretation of such provisions. They cite the UN guidelines for reporting on this article to endorse the idea that the right should be upheld even if a child, while being able to form an opinion, is incapable of communicating it, or if the child is not totally mature, or if he / she has not attained a specific age. And this, they continue, because the principle of participation can never be dissociated from that of non-discrimination. An interesting point with regards to this association is that raised by Verhellen (1993), when he states that, whilst ‘disability’ is amply quoted as a criterion for non-discrimination, ‘age’ is never the object of such reference, which

causes an ambiguous stance in what concerns young children (Alderson, 1999). Still, it is believed that Casas (1997, p.289) is the author who most accurately sums up the discussion on the issue of children's competence for participation as presented in the Convention: he argues that quite often the focus is put on children 'not being yet competent', while, in the end, the problem might reside on many adults 'not being competent enough to understand children's expressions and children's perspectives'.

#### **2.2.1.5. The filters of the international statutory right**

An explanation may be ventured as to the reasons why these elements are formulated in such a way, as well as to the discrepancies that exist between the 'inalienable right' and statutory views of children's right to participation. According to Miljeteig-Olssen (1990, p.149-150), 'the innovative nature of the drafting process explains why the text that resulted from it might be considered not as consistent and clear-cut as it could have been'. In fact, one must consider that the final text of the Convention had to be negotiated, sometimes harshly (Cohen & Naimark, 1991), between drafters for whom – because, for instance, of their different cultural origins – the notion of children's rights did not have the same valence nor meaning (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Eekelaar, 1994; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990). Therefore, when analysing the Convention's participation axis, it must be realised that the statutory view is not a direct transposition into law of the views of those who believe in participation as an 'inalienable' right for children: in fact, if there were groups who lobbied in favour of the inclusion of such rights in the Convention (Hojat, 1997; Veerman, 1992), the final formulation of participation rights also had to respect the views of those who see child participation as anti-family, as disempowering for parents, as dangerous for children and society, etc. (Harris-Short, 2003; Hart & Schwab, 1997; Melton, 1996).



It would be fair to say that these different views are intrinsically linked with the perceptions and attitudes towards children and childhood as well as child-rearing practices, which are widely divergent throughout the world (Edmonds, 1992; Eekelaar, 1994; Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). Murphy-Berman, Levesque and Berman (1996) give some examples of how those differences might be expressed:

‘In cultures that stress an independent orientation, [where] child autonomy and self-sufficiency are valued, it is expected that, at some point, the child will become quite independent of the family environment in which he or she was raised (...). In contrast, in cultures that value interdependence, stress cooperation, compliance, nonassertiveness, and strong loyalties to one’s group and family, these traits enhance the child’s ability to maintain interdependence with and connectedness to the family throughout the life cycle (...). Granting children the amount of participation in decision making affirmed in the Convention (U.N. General Assembly, 1989) may be more problematic in cultures where freedom of expression and self-assertion are less valued than obedience and duty fulfilment and where adult-child interactions are traditionally quite hierarchical’ (Murphy-Berman, Levesque & Berman, 1996, p.1259).

Therefore, as Andrews and Freeman (1997, p.8) explain ‘the *Convention* is a consensus document agreed upon by the *governments* of the world and is thus a product of political compromise’, which is ‘hardly surprising considering that the convention is an international treaty that must take into account a wide range of beliefs, values, and ideologies and that cannot reflect or promote the standpoint of any individual group’ (Cantwell, 1992, p.209).

Some argue that this conciliatory approach will sometimes create a ‘cultural vacuum’ (Casas, 1997; Harris-Short, 2003). Others see it as a positive feature, for two main reasons: firstly, because they view these provisions as representing only the minimum

common denominator upon which each individual country can and should elaborate (Edmonds, 1992); and secondly, because they believe that such an approach leads to ratification by a larger number of countries (Langevin-Falcon, 1998). Virtual worldwide ratification seems to indicate that the latter view has prevailed.

This statutory movement, although not reflecting a view of participation as encompassing as some might have wished for (Cantwell, 1992), has definitely had the merit of putting the issue of child participation at the forefront of discussion (Hart & Schwab, 1997). It should also be noted that, with its international scope, this type of view on participation rights has the potential of becoming available to a much larger number of children. In fact, one of its most observable consequences is that it has encouraged the diffusion of the concept at other levels, notably the European (Council of Europe, 1996).

### **2.2.2. Statutory right at European level**

When considering the statutory view at the European level – in the context of this thesis, the European level refers to the European Union (EU) – a frequently proposed argument is that, because all country members are signatories of the UN Convention, the latter constitutes the ‘strongest instrument of children’s rights currently existing in Europe’ (Verhellen, 1993, p.365). It can, therefore, be argued that the first elements of a statutory view of the right to participation at the European level stem directly from the International. Furthermore, there is an assumption which could easily be made when contemplating a European dimension of such rights: in fact, it is widely acknowledged that participation rights were included in the UN Convention, to a large extent because of the influence of western European countries (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Miljeteig-



Olssen, 1990); it is also known, that these countries' representatives held a view of participation rights that was more extensive than that included in the final formulation in the UN Convention, but which had to be somewhat downplayed to accommodate different views and reach a compromise solution (Cantwell, 1992; Harris-Short, 2003; Langevin-Falcon, 1998); *then*, it would be legitimate to expect that, in a context where the countries' views are supposedly more alike, such compromise did not have to play such an important role and a more encompassing view of children's right to participation would emerge. Yet, as will be seen ahead, this was hardly the case (Aguilar, Aussems & Rüegg, 1997).

Before proceeding to that analysis, one element has to be taken into consideration: it refers to the fact that there is not, at the European level as such, one comprehensive legal instrument that could be considered as the EU equivalent of the UN Convention. This has been pointed out as a gap in the EU legal system in the sense that, whilst the member-states on their own are engaged towards the rights of the child in a legally binding form, the EU as a whole is under no such obligation (EURONET, 2000). For some, the lack a 'whole-Europe' document, lets suppose of an approach which is not sensitive the fact that children make up one fifth of Europe's population (Micklewright & Stewart, 2000) and that, as the EU moves towards further convergence, more and more topics concerning children are becoming supranational (Aguilar, Aussems & Rüegg, 1997). Therefore, they argue, it would only seem appropriate 'that the EU should be bound by international standards that member states have already signed up to' (EURONET, 2000), if not by higher ones (Ruxton, 1999).

While it is true that there is no instrument equivalent to the UN Convention at the European level, this does not mean, nonetheless, that the EU has not passed legislation

in many areas ‘which have a direct or indirect bearing on children’s lives’ (EURONET, 2000). Taking into consideration the focus of this thesis – i.e. that of Education – and with no intention of being exhaustive, this section will now concentrate on legal documents which illustrate the view of children’s statutory right to participation held by the EU. These documents are:

2.2.2.1. The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties;

2.2.2.2. The European Strategy for Children;

2.2.2.3. The European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights;

2.2.2.4. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

#### **2.2.2.1. The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties**

In 1950, the Council of Europe endorsed the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties (ECHR) which came into force in 1953 (Verhellen, 1993). At the forefront of Europe’s post-war concerns, the ECHR covered a vast array of civil, political, economic and social rights and freedoms (Kilkelly, 2001; Stalford, 2002). As it comprises such a comprehensive range of entitlements, it is not surprising to find provisions usually identified as participation-related rights – such as freedom of expression, association and religion – among those consecrated in the ECHR (Kilkelly, 1999). The importance of this document within EU legislation – and of the participation rights it offers – is all the more enhanced if one considers that, unlike the UN Declaration on Human Rights – its ‘homologous’ document at the International level – this is a legally binding instrument (Stalford, 2002). This can be considered as positive as it implies that, in case of a supposed violation, strict measures are provided for its enforcement (Verhellen, 1993).



Moreover, Article 1 of the ECHR guarantees that the rights expressed in it are to be applied to ‘everyone’ (Kilkelly, 2001; Verhellen, 1993). This is, in itself, an interesting aspect to discuss: according to Kilkelly (2001, p.314) ‘this provision has a central role in the way in which the ECHR is interpreted and applied. (...) In theory, then, ECHR rights are guaranteed to all, and there is little, other than the obvious practical difficulties, to prevent their application to children’.

It should not be forgotten that, for many years, this type of reasoning, which considers children as being encompassed by legal instruments initially conceived for adults, was also followed with regards to UN legal instruments (Verhellen, 1993). However, in the present case, this formulation is not as straightforward as it would seem, in what concerns exactly *who* is included in the expression ‘everyone’. Several opinions emerge: one position is that of Kilkelly (1999; 2001) who, while recognising that the application of the provisions of the ECHR to children ‘is not immediately evident given that it contains few specific references to the rights of the child’ (Kilkelly, 2001, p.308), still suggests that there is scope for interpreting this document in an ‘expansive and imaginative way’ (Kilkelly, 2001, p.313), namely by combining it with the UN Convention. This author argues that this has been at the essence of the existing jurisprudence and, therefore, that the guarantees of participation offered by the ECHR are extended to children.

A somewhat different position is that advanced by Verhellen (1993, p.368), who, whilst agreeing with the argument that the existing jurisprudence tends to ‘confirm that children are bearers of these rights’, draws attention to the fact that ‘*non-discrimination* is also important’. Once again, at this level, ‘age does not figure among the criteria for

non-discrimination’, and therefore Verhellen (1993, p.368) concludes that children are left out of the ‘everyone’ to whom the ECHR’s provisions are dedicated.

For other authors (EURONET, 2000; Ruxton, 1999; Stalford, 2000), this particular aspect reflects a serious problem, which is not specific to this document but is also present in most EU legislation, including its founding Treaties. That problem concerns the fact that all these documents use the expression ‘everyone’ as referring to ‘all EU citizens’ when, within the tradition of EU legislation, the predominant interpretation of ‘EU Citizen’ is that of ‘citizen-as-worker’ (EURONET, 2000; Ruxton, 1999).

This formulation of European citizenship in economic terms is, according to these authors, necessarily exclusive of children. They believe it renders children *invisible* within EU law (Ruxton, 1999; Stalford, 2000), that it does not portray them as plenipotentary holders of rights, or even that it lends them an unclear citizenship status (EURONET, 2000). As a follower of this tradition, the ‘ECHR is in many ways blind to children’ and to their participation rights (EURONET, 2000). For this reason, some claim that this document does not attend to the specificity of children’s interests (Ruxton, 1999), in part because it does not recognise ‘that affirmative action may be necessary to enable children to enjoy these rights’ (Kilkelly, 1999). Therefore, and namely through the influence of the UN Convention, a legislative movement is currently under way in order to improve this situation and grant children specific rights within the EU. The following sections will consider three – more recent – legal documents which are inscribed in that movement.



#### 2.2.2.2. The European Strategy for Children

The Council of Europe's project on childhood policies, the so-called European strategy for children, was directly inspired by the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its goal is to reflect, at Europe's political level, some of the aspects of the UN Convention (Conseil de l'Europe, 1996). This instrument intends 'to help translate into national realities the engagements assumed under the dispositions of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child; to promote changes in the views about the child, as a subject of rights; and also to favour his / her active and responsible participation in family and society' (Conseil de l'Europe, 1996, p.9, translated).

Two major differences can be appreciated when comparing these dispositions with those of the ECHR: firstly, because the focus is put on children, they are clearly identified as subjects of rights; and, consequently, their participation is explicitly addressed. Moreover, the notion of participation is formulated in slightly more specific terms than in the UN Convention, as it alludes to the contexts of 'family and society'. This aspect is further elaborated in Article 8, which states that:

'8. The Committee of Ministers should urgently invite the States (...):

vii. to allow children to make their point of view heard in all the decisions concerning them, awarding them a type of participation which is effective, responsible and appropriate to their capacity, at all levels of social life – in the family, the local communities, in school and the other institutions, in the judicial proceedings and at the level of the central government;

viii. to teach children how to act as responsible citizens, to encourage them to be interested in public affairs and to reconsider the age at which adolescents can benefit from the right to vote' (Conseil de l'Europe, 1996, p.11, translated).

The influence of Article 12 of the UN Convention upon this formulation is very clear: some elements of the UN Convention are almost literally repeated in this Article, namely when it refers to the child being heard in decision making processes and to a notion of participation appropriate to their capacity.

Nonetheless, it has some particular aspects which may reveal that the European statutory views of participation are slightly more extensive and uncompromised than those of the UN Convention. One of those aspects is that the loci of social life where child participation is presented as desirable are not only expanded, but are also clearly stated here. Although the modalities for the exercise of participation are not approached, the definition of these fora leaves no place for the kind of ambiguity and vagueness that has sometimes been imputed to the UN Convention (Balton, 1992; Hammarberg, 1990; Hojat, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997; Saks, 1996).

A second aspect, developed in point viii of Article 8, is strongly linked with the European view of participation as intimately related with EU citizenship: the emphasis on stimulating children to be interested in public affairs, as well on lowering the age of voting, denote an engagement towards the improvement of children's status as EU citizens long called for by some authors (Ruxton, 1999; EURONET, 2000). This unarguably enhances the scope of previous statutory views.

Two main criticisms can, nonetheless, be pointed out to this, otherwise progressive, document: one is that, due to the advisory nature of this document, all of its dispositions are formulated as recommendations which are, in effect, not legally binding or enforceable through specific measures; the other aspect is connected with the issue raised earlier by Verhellen (1993) who claims that, in any of these international



documents, participation rights cannot be dissociated from the formulation of non-discrimination principles. The author asserts that, in such instruments, 'age' is seldom considered as a criterion for non-discrimination. In this document, even if non-discrimination is set out as a founding principle, it is formulated merely in terms of 'gender'. Hence, 'age' and even 'disability' are absent from this document as criteria for non-discrimination (although 'disability' is later on considered as a factor for special protection, which can be said to reflect a more 'traditional' attitude) (Conseil de l'Europe, 1996). This might be representative of a conception of, and a discourse on, children which are, to some extent, in contradiction with those of the 'inalienable right' view.

#### **2.2.2.3. The European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights**

This is another document which stems directly from the UN Convention. In fact, its preamble indicates that the pretext for the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights is Article 4 of the UN Convention, which declares that states-parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of its principles (Committee of Experts on Family Law, 1995; Council of Europe, 1996; Verhellen, 1993).

Before analysing its contents there are some aspects of this document's *title* that require attention: one of those aspects is that, by addressing the European Convention to 'children' instead of 'the child', this title seems to abandon the 'individual child approach', which had been established by the UN Convention and is amply mentioned as one of its strengths (Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Freeman, 1997; Wilcox & Naimark,

1991). This impression is reinforced by the fact that, in the actual articles, the expressions ‘child’ and ‘children’ are both indifferently used.

The other aspect is that the encompassing nature of its title might lead to the assumption that the European Convention addresses a comprehensive range of rights. This is believed to be misleading because, in reality, this instrument has a very reduced scope, concentrating exclusively on children’s rights within judicial proceedings. Having devised it as ‘a legal instrument *to supplement* the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Committee of Experts on Family Law considered whether there was a real need for an additional instrument. It was recognised that a European Convention which merely repeated the United Nations Convention and contained a very small number of additional rights in certain specific areas would be of limited value’ (Killerby, 1995, p.127, emphasis added). This last observation can, nonetheless, be contested if one considers – as mentioned before – that the representatives from western Europe countries were among those holding the most encompassing views on children’s rights and, hence, on participation (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990). A European Convention might have constituted an opportunity for further pursuing those views and drafting a more progressive document than the UN Convention.

The path followed by the drafters of the EU Convention is interesting, still, in the sense that it reflects an explicit concern with the *actual exercise* of rights by the children themselves. They recognise ‘that children might not be able to exercise their rights if the internal law of the States did not provide appropriate procedural measures to back up these rights. As this very important matter has not been regulated by the United Nations Convention, which leaves it to states to determine the measures which are appropriate to implement these rights, the Committee considered that there was a real need for a new



Convention to provide appropriate procedures and procedural rights to ensure that children are in fact able to exercise their substantive rights' (Killerby, 1995, p.127). This is certainly a commendable consideration but one that might, once again, give the impression that the scope of procedural rights encompassed is greater than is really the case. Had the recommendations of the European Strategy for Children (Conseil de l'Europe, 1996) been followed, this might have led to the consecration of such rights in a multiplicity of loci. Instead, the only type of procedural rights advanced in the European Convention is the one pertaining to 'family proceedings affecting the child before a judicial authority' (Council of Europe, 1996, p.2). Without questioning the importance of those proceedings, such a provision implies that the responsibility for the enforcement of the European Convention – and inherently, of its participation articles – lies solely with the judicial authorities of the states-parties and no other instances – family, school, etc. – are seen as responsible for that enforcement. In the view supported by this thesis, this is a limitation that could have been overcome, had a more comprehensive perspective been taken.

Having discussed the implications related to this document's title, the view of participation it offers will now be examined. This view is more specifically expressed in Articles 3 and 6. Article 3 states that:

'A child considered by internal law as having sufficient understanding, in the case of proceedings before a judicial authority affecting him or her, shall be granted, and shall be entitled to request, the following rights:

- a) to receive all relevant information;
- b) to be consulted and express his or her views;
- c) to be informed of the possible consequences with these views and the possible consequences of any decision' (Council of Europe, 1996, p.3).

In Article 6, which refers to decision-making, in addition to the three points mentioned above, it is also asserted in point c) that ‘[the judicial authority shall] give due weight to the views expressed by the child’ (Council of Europe, 1996, p.4). The analysis of these articles may provide a composite image of the view on participation put forward by this document. Its main aspects are, once again, similar to those of Article 12 of the UN Convention, i.e. being informed and consulted, expressing views and having them taken seriously. The ‘pseudo-competence’ element is also present, although holding a particularity: in the present instrument, it is clearly stated that these rights can be forfeited if the internal law of the states-members indicates so (Council of Europe, 1996). This creates the precedent for internally determined specific age limits being respected – or even created – which is a view that even the UN Convention did not endorse (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999).

One innovative element is the notion of children being informed of any possible consequences of their views. This entails an element of projection in the future, which, although intrinsically related to the nature of the proceedings in question, e.g. custody, adoption, legal guardianship, etc. (Killerby, 1995) is potentially interesting for application in other contexts. Moreover, this EU Convention has the undeniable merit of being the first legally binding document addressing children’s rights at the European level as a whole.

#### **2.2.2.4. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**

Dating from December 2000, ‘the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights sets out in a single text, for the first time in the European Union’s history, the whole range of civil, political, economic and social rights of European citizens and all persons



resident in the EU' (European Convention, 2000). This document builds upon and reaffirms the rights already consecrated in previous legally binding instruments such as the ECHR. Although not legally binding in itself, it 'must be seen as a symbolic means of signalling that the legitimacy of the Union is to be unconditionally based on the aspiration to effectively protect and promote individual fundamental rights' (Menéndez, 2001). This aspect becomes all the more important if one considers that, by pertaining to EU institutions and bodies, rather than directly to the member states, it is imbued with a much longed for 'whole-Europe' and supranational engagement (Menéndez, 2001; Ruxton, 1999).

Due to its comprehensive nature, this instrument can be considered as the epitome of the European views on Human Rights. For that reason, while it was being drafted, children's rights advocacy groups perceived it as constituting the ideal locus for unequivocally conveying Europe's position on children's rights. During that period a lobbying campaign took place, which was conducted by the European Children's Action Network (EURONET). EURONET is an organism based on a coalition of NGOs and networks from across the member states, which 'was established with the assistance of the European Commission to identify areas of particular concern in relation to children and young people in the European Union' (Stalford, 2000, p.123). This organism tried to ensure that the status of children as EU citizens was clearly spelled out in this document and that certain specific rights for children were introduced (Stalford, 2000).

These efforts seem to have been successful as, in the final text of the Charter, 'age' is, for the first time in any international document, formally established as a criterion for non-discrimination in the access to such rights (European Commission, Council and

Parliament, 2000). Moreover, even if its nature as a general human rights instrument entails that all its articles are formulated in the traditional ‘everyone has the right to’, children are considered, in Article 24, as holders of specific rights. It is, therefore, interesting to examine the view of participation as a statutory right purported in this document:

‘24.1 Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.

24.2 In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child’s best interests must be a primary consideration.’ (European Commission, Council and Parliament, 2000).

At first glance, it can – perhaps not surprisingly – be appreciated that the principles of ‘protection’ and the ‘best interest of the child’ are used in this document in similar terms to those used in the UN Convention (European Convention, 2000). The ‘pseudo-competence’ element is also represented by the phrase ‘age and maturity’. Participation is, hence, formulated in terms of children expressing views and having them taken in consideration, which do not constitute particular improvements on existing instruments. Although the view of participation rights for children that this Charter purports is not very innovative in itself, a positive step forward is undeniable for it is the first general human rights instrument in the EU that specifically recognises them as independent of adults’. Also, not only public authorities but private institutions are given the responsibility of upholding those rights.

Finally, it can be argued that a major innovation, introduced by this document, is that, by including ‘age’ as a factor for non-discrimination, the whole range of rights attributed to ‘everyone’ – including enhanced participation rights – is now



unequivocally applicable to children as well. If this reasoning were pursued, not only young children, but also children with SEN would be entitled to them (Lansdown, 1998) for 'disability' is also explicitly mentioned as a factor for non-discrimination. A less encouraging aspect, though, is that these progressive dispositions become ambiguous when more 'pseudo-competence' approaches are used as restrictive in the access to rights. Unfortunately, that notion is still present in this document.

#### **2.2.2.5. The filters of the European statutory right**

This section proposes a comparative analysis of the view of participation rights held at the European level. It will, thus, resume the documents that have been presented above, comparing them with one another and with the views presented in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Some authors consider that, in the field of human rights legislation, 'the EU's overall competence in relation to children's issues is restricted and lacks coherence' (Ruxton, 1999). This view is understandable if one considers that in the EU founding Treaties as well as in the ECHR, children's rights are hardly addressed. As EURONET (2000) points out, 'other groups such as consumers, women, animals, disabled people are at least mentioned in the existing EU Treaties. This means that EU legislation, policy and programming are, to a certain extent, sensitive to their fundamental rights and interests. However in the area of children's policy, this is currently not the case'. It can also be claimed that these documents do not apply to children because they repeatedly ascertain participation rights as pertaining to 'EU citizens-as-workers' (Ruxton, 1999), a conception that is necessarily exclusive of children. Some profess that this conception

has also led to an uncertain status for children as citizens and rendered them, and their participation rights, invisible within EU policy (Casas, 1997; Stalford, 2000).

In recent years, however, the design of EU legislation in this field has suffered the influence of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention’s views are reflected, namely, in the three instruments analysed, which convey the current EU views on children’s participation rights: the European Strategy for Children (Conseil de l’Europe, 1996), the European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights (Council of Europe, 1996) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (European Commission, Council and Parliament, 2000). The following table (Table 2.2) hopes to demonstrate that influence by focusing on the participation-oriented elements of the UN Convention which find themselves repeated in the European level documents.

Table 2.2: Participation-oriented elements from the UN Convention repeated in EU instruments

Elements from UN Convention repeated in EU documents	European Strategy	European Convention	European Charter
Receive information	X	✓	X
Be heard in decision-making	✓	X	X
Be consulted/ express views	X	✓	✓
Views taken seriously/given weight	X	✓	✓
‘Pseudo-competence’ approach	✓	✓	✓

According to Table 2.2, it could be argued that the European statutory view on participation rights is quite similar to the International view, in that it accentuates the importance of adults imparting and receiving information from the child and of taking that information into serious consideration.



There are nonetheless, some specific characteristics of the European view which are worth addressing: one of those characteristics is the definition of a EU position on the issue of children's competence for exercising participation rights. As it can be appreciated in Table 2.2, all three documents present a 'pseudo-competence' approach, in that they include clauses with regards to the access to participation rights being, in one way or the other, *restricted* by the child's age, capacity or maturity. There are, however, some discrepancies among them in the way those restrictions are defined: the European Convention, for instance, is a document that allows for the introduction of specific age limits to the exercise of rights. This is, as seen above, a notion that had been somewhat discredited even by the UN Convention (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999). On the other hand, the European Charter, by explicitly introducing 'age' as a factor for non-discrimination, can be considered the most progressive international document in this area, even if it does not uphold that principle to its full extent. It is believed that these discrepancies give credit to Ruxton's (1999) claims of incoherence within EU policy on this field.

Other specifically European elements include: a great emphasis on the notion of citizenship as indissociable from that of participation, which is present in the European Strategy for Children. Furthermore, there is a specification of the loci conceived as appropriate for the exercise of children's participation, e.g. in the European Convention and again in the European Strategy, which can be considered as a more useful formulation than that put forward by the UN Convention. These last aspects might help support the view that the EU could still constitute a good forum for a more progressive and uncompromised view on participation rights, as its members share potentially more similar conceptions of children and their rights, but it is believed that is not yet the case (Aguilar, Aussems & Rüegg, 1997).

### **2.3. Granted and exercised rights to participation at the macro-levels**

Having addressed the issues pertaining to the statutory view at the macro-levels, the current section will concentrate on the granted and exercised views. However, before presenting this part of the chapter, a few caveats are in order: one of them has to do with conflating the International and the European levels. This decision was motivated by the fact that, in this section, the goal is less to present specific events regarding children's granted and exercised participation rights, than that of discussing the modalities those rights can assume, which are quite similar on both levels. The other issue pertains to the decision of combining granted and exercised rights as it can be argued that, for the most part, the two sorts of views are also interwoven at these macro-levels. In fact, due to their very nature, these are levels at which, if adults do not put in place the mechanisms enabling children to exercise their participation rights, the latter are either seriously compromised, or can hardly take place.

In fact, this connection is also present in what some authors claim is a paradoxical aspect of the UN Convention (Melton & Limber, 1992), which, albeit more specifically directed at that particular document, can certainly be extended to all legal instruments presented in the previous sections. The paradox is that, in a document supposed to guarantee children the right to express their opinion on matters affecting them, at no point were children's views sought or were they involved in its drafting (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990). One can only wonder 'whether the Convention would have looked the same had its framers consulted children on its content' (Freeman, 1992b, p.53). Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997, pp.67-68) share that concern, while providing one of the best examples of a 'granted' view of participation rights:



‘To ask whether children should have been part of the process, or if they would have wanted to, would be the very least we could do. Perhaps the answer would have been simple: ‘probably not’. Perhaps that is one good example of a task better left to adults, protecting the youngest from the tedious, word-splitting labour of international lawmaking. However, if the question is answered in this way, we are falling into the trap that ensnares so many others: considering ‘children’ as one homogeneous group regardless of age and, without asking them, presuming that adults have all the answers. The question should be countered with other questions: ‘In what ways could children participate in the development of an international Convention concerning their rights? How could the views and opinions of pre-school children, school age children and teenagers be secured?’

Once again, it can be deduced that, for these authors, participation is not a matter to be put in question in itself; only that the modalities it can assume are to be adapted according to the characteristics of each child. This aspect leads to the issue of how children can effectively participate in processes occurring at these macro-levels.

Considering Lansdown’s typology (2001, see chapter 1) of the forms participatory activities may assume, it can be argued that, at these macro levels, child participation would involve mainly consultative processes or self-advocacy. Indeed, the most commonly proposed modalities are those of international children’s movements and of participation in international conferences, under the scope of multiple organisations. For an account of specific movements and past conferences, please refer to Eskeland (1996); Hart and Schwab (1997); John (1996); Lansdown (2001); UNICEF (1990b). Still, children’s participation in these fora is not straightforward: many consider that they hold limitations, notably in terms of the type and quality of that participation, when compared to the characteristics of ‘genuine’ exercised participation presented in Chapter 1 (Lansdown, 2001).

Concerning the former aspect, John (1996) suggests that it is difficult to establish global or European movements of children. In fact, those movements may be difficult to create, if not by other reasons (such as the allocation of resources) at least by the sheer amplitude, accessibility and potential number of children to involve (John, 1996). As to participation in international conferences, the problems detected are not less important: two of the more frequently mentioned are, on the one hand, the nature of children's participation and their role in such events and, on the other hand, the issue of representativeness. Firstly, it is argued that, quite often, the role of children in these conferences, e.g. as observers, speakers, or representatives of their country, is, at best, unclear to them (Hart, 1992) and, in the worst case scenario, even tokenistic (Gale, Hills, Moulds & Stacey, 1999). A good example of this tokenistic pitfall is the supposed self-advocacy of children in special circumstances, who are used to attract attention for certain causes (Arnold, 2002), without fully understanding their role (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1992). Another issue is that of the real impact that children's participation can have in the context of an international conference, i.e. of how willing adults are to listen to the children's perspectives and commit to act upon them (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). This relates more closely to a 'granted' rights perspective and to the dominant conceptions about the value of children's views. As Gale *et al.* (1999) argue, in those contexts there is often nothing more than a paternalistic approach to children or an exploitation of their possible impact on the media.

This will necessarily depend on how conferences are structured and how child-friendly their environment is (Gale *et al.*, 1999). Numerous accounts, many by former child-representatives themselves, indicate that this clarification does not always take place, which can only create frustration in the children (Eskeland, 1996), as well as a feeling of being deceived in their expectations (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Lansdown, 2001).



Finally, an issue that arises often is that of the representativeness (and selection modalities) of the children that participate in such events, in relation with the population they are supposed to be representing (Gale *et al.*, 1999). Concern has been expressed to the effect that, more often than not, it is the very articulate or most ‘media-friendly’ children who are chosen by teachers or other adults – and, hence, not by their peers – and that that choice is made on the basis of those characteristics alone (Hart & Schwab, 1997). The criticism implied is that, even if they make very pertinent interventions, these children can only speak for themselves, for they have not consulted, have no accountability, nor do they report back to their peers (John, 1996).

Considering these problems, some authors, in quite a critical manner, raise questions as to whether effective participation can truly be exercised at these macro-fora. Hart and Schwab (1997) criticise, for instance, the artificiality of such contexts and make a case for the much greater importance of children participating in everyday processes. When comparing the two, they conclude that large conferences and ‘those single events — like a forum, conference, or town meeting — are based on little or no ongoing substantial participation in anything. (...) Child advocates and facilitators who take part in these events tend to focus on achieving democratic processes during the event, and much less so on the everyday institutional context and processes leading up to the event. One must focus on regular functioning; then the special events will be a natural, authentic by-product rather than a token democratic aberration’ (Hart & Schwab, 1997, p.189).

These issues also reinforce the important question as to the feasibility of authentic ‘granted’ and ‘exercised’ participation in these contexts. As it was seen, opinions on the matter diverge: some, such as Hart and Schwab (1997) express serious doubts to the

effect that that is possible, whereas others, like Gale *et al.* (1999), Lansdown (2001) and Miljeteig-Olssen (1990), suggest that it is not impossible, provided that certain conditions are met and they are understood by all, children as well as adults. One of the first conditions is a clear definition of the type of event at stake, i.e. delineating, for instance, if the event it is an adult-oriented conference, at which children are invited to make a presentation; or if it is a conference organised jointly for adults and children; or yet one set up with and for children, etc. (Lansdown, 2001). This aspect will necessarily have major implications in outlining the roles of children and adults. Besides a clear definition of roles, other conditions include a serious reflection upon the reasons for involving children in those events; upon which stages they are to be involved in; upon how children are selected and prepared for the event; and upon the intended outcomes of the conference (Gale *et al.*, 1999; Lansdown, 2001).

Nevertheless, even if all the above mentioned issues are properly addressed, it is still defensible that, in events occurring at these levels, the problem of participation being accessible to only a minority of children will always exist (Hart & Schwab, 1997). It is believed that this diminishes their impact as meaningful loci for children to exercise their participation rights.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter was intended to clarify the nature of children's right to participation at the macro-levels. It is proposed that these are levels in which participation is addressed mainly through statutory measures. The latter occupy most of the debate on these issues presented in the literature, either in terms of theoretical analysis, or political discourse, or engaged advocacy (John, 1998).



When compared to the ‘inalienable right’ view, it is noticeable that certain filters are imposed on the right to participation by the ‘statutory’ view. As it was argued, perhaps the main filter is the introduction of the notion of ‘pseudo-competence’ – i.e. that by which competence is inferred *a priori* from other variables, such as age or SEN – as restricting the access to the right. This is present in all the statutory instruments, whether International or European (Verhellen, 1993).

Some suggest also that the great investment in statutory measures, which has taken place further to the UN Convention, did not leave much space for the reflection on the actual granted and exercised participation at these levels (Fields & Narr, 1992; Saks, 1996). In fact, if those types of participation do exist in the form of conferences and international children’s movements, the nature of such contexts and the way in which they are organised, are often questioned (Hart & Schwab, 1997). It is also argued that such aspects render the right to participation inaccessible and impracticable for a vast majority of children.

Hence, this review will now move on to the examination of the levels that are progressively closer to the centre of the system, which offer potentially better conditions for the participation of each and every individual child (Jupp, 1990; Saks, 1996).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Participation at the meso-levels: National / Regional**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

Considering that the objective of this exercise is to present the several forms that children's right to participation may assume at different levels, many issues arise when reaching the level of a country or of a region. In fact, as it was discussed in the previous chapter, if encompassing documents – allowing for a comprehensive analysis – exist at the International and European levels, when trying to assess statutory, granted and exercised rights to participation in the context of a nation or region, sheer diversity becomes an issue. With such culturally distinct countries all over the world, it is necessarily very difficult to elaborate on the form participation takes or should take at the level of a nation, let alone at the level of a given region within a country (Burman, 2003; Harris-Short, 2003).

The literature entails many examples of isolated programmes and initiatives developed by different countries in this field (e.g. Hart & Schwab, 1997; Hodgkin & Newell, 1999). However, the purpose set for this section is not one of characterising the policy and practice of any specific country. Instead, it is that of examining what mechanisms and interpretations of participation rights for children can exist at, and be characteristic of, national and regional levels. The need was felt, then, to attend to sources that portrayed such interpretations as well as the mechanisms put in place by different nations.



In order to discuss the choice of the sources used in the present chapter, a brief prologue is necessary: as mentioned in chapter 2, one of the innovations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the fact that it encompasses a self-monitoring mechanism aimed at ensuring its enforcement (Balton, 1990; Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Melton, 1996; Osler, 1998). That mechanism is the creation of a Committee on the Rights of the Child – constituted by ten experts elected from all parts of the world and hereafter designated as ‘Committee’ – which has the task of assessing the states-parties’ status, progress and difficulties in the enforcement of the UN Convention (Balton, 1990; Cantwell, 1992).

The innovative aspect of this approach lies in the fact that the basic good will of every state-party is presumed and, consequentially, no punitive measures are previewed; ‘instead, States Parties’ compliance with treaty obligations is strictly voluntary’ (Cohen & Naimark, 1991, p.62). The underlying assumption is that each state party, by ratifying the UN Convention, is genuinely willing to respect children’s rights, including their participation rights (Balton, 1990; Stone, 2002). The perspective taken is, therefore, one of establishing a co-operative effort between the states parties and the Committee, which is to be seen more as a resource and advising centre, than as a coercive or adversarial stance (Cantwell, 1992; Edmonds, 1992; Kilkelly, 2001). This organism intends, therefore, to assume a pro-active rather than a re-active role in monitoring compliance (Verhellen, 1993).

This way of proceeding, while innovative and well-intentioned, has, however, also been referred to as the ‘Achilles’ Heel’ of the UN Convention by those who advocate the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms (Ledogar, 1993; Verhellen, 1993). Nonetheless, others, such as Hammarberg (1990, p. 102) perceive it as a positive approach for it ‘is different from the usual model in the field of human rights. The thrust

is not finger pointing but rather constructive and aid oriented. The idea is that the committee, together with the reporting government and the aid agencies, should attempt to define the problems and discuss what remedies are necessary’.

In order to achieve this exchange of information, as it can be deduced from the paragraph above, states-parties engage themselves to send periodic comprehensive *reports* to the Committee concerning the enforcement of the UN Convention in their own country (Cohen & Naimark, 1991).

States-parties are to follow the guidelines supplied by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (1991; 1996) when reporting. Therefore, the reports they produce have a rather uniform structure and all comprise a section on Article 12, which, as seen in chapter 2, is the one focusing more extensively on children’s participation (Kilkelly, 1999; Lücker-Babel, 1995). Henceforth, it was judged that these reports would be valuable sources of information for the assessment of national and regional perspectives (Cohen, Hart & Kosloske, 1992; 1996). The decision was taken, therefore, to review and analyse the sections of these reports which pertained to participation.

When considering which countries’ reports to review, it is recognised that it might have been interesting to portray the perspectives of all the world’s nations. However, it is not the purpose of this review to exhaust all the forms that participation can have at the national and regional levels in all possible cultural contexts. This certainly falls within the interest and scope of future research developments.

For a matter of pertinence to the current study, as well as of coherence with the previous chapter, it seemed appropriate to focus on the reports of the fifteen member states of the



European Union. This option is also sustainable in terms of the possibility of analysing what is understood by children's right to participation in the context of western industrialised nations, i.e. in countries having (in principle) a closer affinity than it might be the case, had every nation been encompassed.

Further to this decision, however, certain issues had to be taken into consideration. One of those issues is that, as it happens with all documents, these reports were produced with an underlying intention (Duffy, 1987, 1999). In this case, the intention was for a country's government officials to give, to a panel of experts, an account of the children's rights situation in that country. Therefore, even if they try to present an accurate a picture as possible, the reports will necessarily carry the bias of governments desiring to be favourably appreciated in the eyes of the Committee. Some mention that the main reason behind this bias is that no country wants to be famous throughout the world for their disrespect of children's rights (Balton, 1990). In fact, it has been argued (Eekelaar, 1994; Scherer & Hart, 1999) – and it was also perceived when analysing these fifteen reports – that sometimes the countries will tend to omit or avoid reporting in areas where they believe they may have a weaker performance. For a more accurate picture of the actual *status quo* in each country, the information provided in the reports would have to be confronted with that originating from other sources, such as non-governmental organisations (Cohen & Naimark, 1991).

Not neglecting these caveats, it is believed, nonetheless, that these reports have great value as sources for this review. This is mainly because, as mentioned above, the intention of this chapter is not to analyse any given country's situation regarding children's rights. The exercise is, rather, one of portraying the modes, fields and fora that nations address when describing those participatory mechanisms and, hence,

forming a global picture of what participation may look like at the national and regional levels. These aspects are all present in the reports and are revealing of the countries' general perceptions and attitudes towards participation.

Because states parties engage themselves to report to the Committee two years after ratifying the UN Convention and thereafter every five years (Scherer & Hart, 1999), most countries, depending on their ratification date, will have, up to this moment (as of Jan. 2002), reported either once or twice to the Committee. The decision was taken to review the most recent reports publicly available, which suggests that, for ten out of fifteen countries, their first report was considered, whilst for the other five countries, their second report was used. These reports are available from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Geneva, Switzerland or at <http://www.unhchr.ch>) and were produced between 1992 and 1999. For an account of which of the countries' reports, i.e. first or second, was used, please consult the Appendix 1.

The option to use both first and second reports might be criticised on the basis of a certain disparity in the actuality of information. However, it was judged that the most recent information available for each country would provide a better appreciation of the countries' current attitudes and that it would not be appropriate to use reports that had been rendered obsolete by subsequent versions. Still, one element attached to this decision has to be taken into account: while the Committee's second guidelines (1996) gave precise indications on what fields the countries should cover when reporting on each of the Convention's articles, it has been argued that the Committee's (1991) first guidelines were not very detailed (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996), thus leading to more vague modes of reporting. This is patent when comparing the number of issues



addressed, and the detail in which they are described, between first and second reports. Paradoxically, while this might constitute a difficulty towards accurate monitoring, for the purpose of this exercise it may be considered as an advantage: if only because the views expressed in the first reports – in this case regarding participation elements, modes and fora – stem more directly from each nation's own understanding and interpretation of article 12. Therefore, they can perhaps be considered more valid and non-biased by extraneous elements – such as the views of the Committee itself which were impregnated in their reporting guidelines – and as being closer to what a less influenced account by each nation might look like.

All these aspects taken into consideration, the sections regarding Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, presented in the reports of the fifteen European Union states-members were the object of a careful review. Although there might be allusions to participation-oriented policy and practice elsewhere in the reports, the rationale followed supports the decision to focus on the sections pertaining to Article 12. An exception to this principle was made, however, when the reports mentioned that a specific participation-related issue was reported under another article, in which case both articles were considered. Being coherent with the structure presented in chapter 1, the review of the reports focused also on the collection and analysis of elements referring to a *statutory, granted and exercised* right to participation for children. These constitute the object of the following sections.

## **3.2. Statutory right at the meso-levels**

### **3.2.1. Statutory right at the National level**

As an introduction to this section, it must be recalled that the ratification of the UN Convention implies that its dispositions become legally binding in the ratifying country (Balton, 1990; 1992; UNICEF, 1997). This entails that such dispositions also become part of national law and that the country is obliged to enforce its principles and standards (Lansdown, Waterson & Baum, 1996). Therefore, as it happened with the European level, it can be argued that one view of the statutory right to participation at the National level is that proposed by the UN Convention itself. However, there are also other national legal mechanisms, specific to each country – prior to or following the UN Convention – which the states-members present in their reports as representative of children's participation as a statutory right (Owen & Tarr, 1998). In fact, as Edmonds (1992, p.206) suggests, the UN Convention's provisions should be considered as 'only the *minimum* standard for children's rights. The drafters of the Convention anticipated this and added an umbrella article, Article 41, that guarantees the child the highest existing national or international legal standards for rights even if lower standards are encoded in the Convention'. These national standards and provisions constitute, then, the object of interest when reviewing the countries' reports.

The review had no intention of providing a thorough statistical analysis, which would be displaced here, but to examine the content of the reports focusing on the perceptions and attitudes they convey towards children's right to participation. Therefore, the procedure of analysis was as follows: as these reports are organised in paragraphs, it seemed interesting to assess, in a first stage, the number and percentage of paragraphs



each of the different countries dedicated to article 12 within the totality of the reports. Attention must be drawn, however, to the fact that this is not a measure that can be taken on its own or out of its context, because the quantity of paragraphs may not necessarily indicate the quality of participation-oriented statutory measures upheld by a country. Nonetheless, it is believed that this provides an interesting indication of the place and importance given by each of the countries to participation issues, from within the plethora of children's rights' aspects they were bound to report on.

Furthermore, as there are 41 substantive articles in the Convention – i.e. articles on which states members are potentially required to report – it is also possible to determine the percentage of paragraphs that should have hypothetically been allocated to each article, had they been equally distributed (i.e. total number of paragraphs / 41 articles x 100 / total number of paragraphs = 2.44%). Therefore, a higher or lower percentage than the one expected may also bear witness to the greater or lesser importance awarded by each country to participation rights. It should, nonetheless, be understood that this is an indicative and somewhat artificial measure for the reports are not necessarily conceived in such a way, i.e. with an even number of paragraphs attributed to each article.

In fact, even the articles themselves might not be perceived as of equal value: Article 12, for instance, is purported as also embodying one of the guiding principles of the whole UN Convention, that of participation (Lücker-Babel, 1995). Therefore, it would not be difficult to envisage that States parties might have invested more in their reporting on this article, than they might have in other articles. Having these considerations in mind, both the above mentioned analyses were carried out and their results can be observed in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Comparison between total number of paragraphs and those dedicated to Article 12 in EU countries' reports

Countries	Total number of paragraphs in reports	Number of participation-related paragraphs	Percentage of participation-related paragraphs	Above or below expected percentage (i.e. 2.44%)
Austria	529	19	3.59	Above
Belgium	482	19	3.94	Above
Denmark	289	13	4.50	Above
Finland	342	5	1.46	Below
France	430	19	4.42	Above
Germany	122	2	1.64	Below
Greece	462	9	1.95	Below
Ireland	659	13	1.97	Below
Italy	242	4	1.65	Below
Luxembourg	883	3	0.34	Below
Netherlands	424	10	2.36	Below
Portugal	559	13	2.33	Below
Spain	1577	56	3.55	Above
Sweden	793	22	2.77	Above
United Kingdom	182	21	11.54	Above
AVERAGE	611.42	19.81	3.57	Above

Disparity between the fifteen countries, both in number of total paragraphs and of those dedicated to participation, is the first striking aspect of table 3.1. It can be noticed for instance that, while Spain produced a report with 1577 paragraphs – 56 of which dedicated to participation issues – Germany’s report did not go beyond 122 paragraphs, of which only 2 were dedicated to participation. Such a disparity might be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that the Committee’s first guidelines (1991) were not very specific; on the other hand, there is also the fact mentioned in chapter 2 to the effect that the dispositions of Article 12 were somewhat vague, which might have led the countries to report as each of them saw fit. This idea is, in fact, reinforced by certain statements that can be found in various points of the reports, from which the following constitutes a good example:

‘In contrast to article 13, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which assures the child the right to freedom of expression in all matters, irrespective of whether the child is already capable of forming his or her own views, article 12 only assures the child the opportunity to be heard in all matters affecting the child (para.1) as well as in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting the child (para.2); the right of the child to express his or her views



that is laid down in article 12, paragraph 1, is intended to apply only to those children who are capable of forming their own views. *The States parties are thus given some leeway to decide in which cases and to what extent they shall take the views of the child into consideration*' (Germany's report, 1994, emphasis added).

This type of statement encompasses a somewhat defensive position with regards to Article 12, which can be deemed as illustrative of the country's attitude towards it. For these reasons, more than considering absolute values, it becomes interesting to appreciate what proportion of the reports is related to participation: as shown in table 3.1, the expected percentage would be 2.44%, and a global average of 3.57% can be observed for these countries as a whole. Therefore, participation seems to have been given a relatively high level of importance within the reports.

From this point forward, the results of the countries will generally be considered as a block, taking into account that the purpose of this review is not to analyse the performance of any single country. However, it was judged important to address them separately in the current table (Table 3.1) because it is believed that the individual countries' results raise an interesting issue: when examining which of the EU countries are situated above or below average with regards to participation-related statutory measures, a certain tendency can be noticed. That is a tendency towards two blocks of nations being formed: one encompassing mostly northern and certain central Europe countries which form the 'above average' block; while the southern countries are grouped in another block with the rest of the central Europe nations, and have a 'below average' position. The issue raised by this aspect is that of the relation between social context and the pertinence of participation rights in a given country. In fact, some associate this issue with that of participation being considered as a 'luxury' right, awarded to children, exclusively in contexts where either more 'basic' rights have long

been fulfilled (Hart, Zeidner & Pavlovic, 1996), or where conceptions of children and childhood approximate more closely those of an ‘inalienable right’ view (Harris-Short, 2003).

This relates, furthermore, to the presence of a cultural bias in such concepts, which implies that claims of universality are difficult to sustain (Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Osler, 1998). Ennew and Miljeteig (1996, p.215) push this reflection farther when they argue that ‘the Convention on the Rights of the Child (...) is sometimes viewed at best as being inapplicable outside Northern countries or at worst as an instrument of cultural imperialism’. Although this might be a relevant tendency, it is believed that, in practice, the right to participation need not be framed in such manner or considered as a ‘luxury’ right, exclusive to wealthy nations. These issues will be further developed in chapter 4.

For the moment, it is interesting to go beyond the *quantity* aspect and concentrate on the *content* of the countries’ reports in order to appreciate the statutory elements regarding participation at the national and regional levels that they wished to present. Therefore, the aspects of the reports that concerned participation-related legal dispositions which encompassed a statutory view, were collected from within those paragraphs dedicated to participation. For a matter of coherence, these measures – in a total of 221 – were then classified taking into consideration the previously referred constitutive elements of article 12: the *context* element, i.e. the fora involved; the *content* element, i.e. the type of disposition (namely if they were formulated as enforceable rights, or just as a recommendations); and the *competence* element, i.e. whom the measure was addressed to.



As it can be recalled, these elements are presented in Article 12 under the following formulations:

A) CONTEXT: ‘judicial and administrative proceedings directly or through a representative’ and ‘all matters affecting the child’;

B) CONTENT: ‘Be provided the opportunity to be heard’ and ‘Express views freely’;

C) COMPETENCE: ‘child who is capable of forming views’; ‘those views being given due weight according to age and maturity’.

With the intent of organising this section, ‘context’ was taken as the grouping element for the analysis and subsequent discussion. Two broad contexts were then identified: that of judicial and administrative proceedings, and that of other various proceedings. Within the other various proceedings, special relevance was attributed to the context of education, since it constitutes the main object of interest of this thesis. Hence the subsections of this chapter will be addressing participation according each of these three contexts and will focus on each specific context. The general results can, nonetheless, be found in Appendix 2.

#### **3.2.1.1. Participation in judicial and administrative proceedings**

Being the only element clearly referred in article 12, it is not surprising that legal dispositions pertaining to judicial and administrative proceedings make up more than 60% of the countries’ reported measures regarding participation. Within those 60%, the distribution is as such:

Table 3.2: Elements relating to the judicial and administrative contexts at the national level and their incidence (in percentage)

Welfare and Social Services (35.3%)	Relations with parents (28.6%)	Criminal proceedings (22.6%)	Other regarding personal status (13.5%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adoption</li><li>- Guardianship</li><li>- Residential placement</li><li>- Welfare</li><li>- Being taken into state care</li><li>- Asylum</li><li>- Citizenship</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Paternity determination and recognition</li><li>- Divorce</li><li>- Custody</li><li>- Visitation and access</li><li>- Conflict with parents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Juvenile court</li><li>- Crimes committed against minor</li><li>- Crimes committed by minor</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Name change</li><li>- Emancipation</li><li>- Marriage</li><li>- Minor who is also a parent</li><li>- Abortion</li><li>- Property</li><li>- Contracts</li></ul>

From the results presented in table 3.2, it can be inferred that one of the characteristics of the statutory right at the national level is that it materialises into a multiplicity of specific expressions. It can, therefore, be argued that the contextual vagueness of which previous levels were sometimes accused is no longer apparent.

Another type of analysis which seems relevant to perform on these reports, pertains to the ‘competence element’, i.e. the analysis of whom these measures are supposed to encompass. This element comprises, notably, whether the different countries’ legislators have introduced any limits with regards to the age from which children would have access to the prescribed dispositions, i.e. if they have assumed a ‘pseudo-competence’ perspective. As it can be appreciated in table 3.3 that is the case for most legal proceedings in this area (39.1%).

Table 3.3: Type and beneficiaries of judicial and administrative provisions at the national statutory level

	No right	Recommendation	Enforceable right	Total
Child (no age limit)	6	15	26	47 (35.3%)
Child, depending on development	0	10	9	19 (14.3%)
A specific age is set	2	13	37	54 (39.1%)
Juvenile, teenager, adolescent	0	3	2	5 (3.8%)
A representative in the child’s name	0	1	9	10 (7.5%)
Total	8 (6%)	42 (31.6%)	83 (62.4%)	133 (100%)



This becomes all the more important if it is recalled that the UN Convention formulated the right of participation in slightly less restrictive terms, i.e. as accessible to children considering both age and maturity aspects, as well as the child being able to form his / her own views, with no specific age limit referred. As it was previously argued, in the light of these aspects, the institution of a specific age limit by the countries can constitute a step backwards, as chronological age may be considered as an arbitrary indicator of a child's capacity to participate (Casas, 1997). Thus, the exclusion of any child from the access to participation rights, based solely on the age criterion, would not only go against those rights as formulated in the UN Convention (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999) but also against the principles established by the 'inalienable right' view on this issue, which have been addressed in chapter 1.

Another interesting aspect is to see how the legislator has formulated participation rights in terms of 'content', i.e. if they are conceived as enforceable, by the use of expressions such as 'the child has the right to...', 'the child is entitled to...', 'it is a requirement that the child be heard'; or if, on the other hand, these dispositions are formulated more as recommendations, i.e. as desirable outcomes, yet ultimately unenforceable. The latter are represented by expressions such as 'the child may be heard', 'whenever possible there should be...'.

The least desirable situation is necessarily that where the countries recognise that, according to national law, children have no participation rights whatsoever in an area judged as affecting them directly. It is, however, very rare that the countries make such admission – only 6% of the total measures reported admit so, as it is shown in table 3.3 – and this is perhaps, as Balton (1990) suggests, because they do not want to be badly appreciated in the eyes of the Committee. The most common tendency seems to be just

to avoid mentioning, altogether, the areas where they believe there are legal gaps (Scherer & Hart, 1999).

An apparently positive aspect that can also be appreciated in table 3.3, with regards to the ‘content’ element, is that most dispositions are framed as enforceable rights (62.4%). Yet, caution must be present when attributing a positive valence to such provisions. Indeed, it may be argued that an enforceable provision can only be considered as an *a priori* right if at least two conditions are fulfilled: that it bears a positive entitlement for the child and that, just as an adult would, the child is able to choose to exercise that right or not. This caveat is all the more pertinent as there are countries – in this instance, two countries – where the legal measures *oblige* minors to make a deposition in court in certain cases, e.g. in abortion cases.

In the view sustained by this thesis, these dispositions can hardly be considered as true participation rights or as promoting the best interest of the minor. That being said, it should be clear that if invoking children’s best interests can be a valid argument for preventing them from participating in certain judicial proceedings which might be harmful to them – e.g. making depositions as witnesses of a crime – that principle should not be used as an argument for impeding the exercise of their participation rights altogether (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999; Lewis, 1996).

#### **3.2.1.2. Participation in other contexts**

Contexts other than judicial and administrative proceedings make up for 39.8% of the legal dispositions regarding children’s participation at this level. As mentioned above, because education is the main field of interest of this thesis, the decision was taken to



analyse it on its own. That analysis will constitute the object of the section 3.2.2.2. For that reason, the current section addresses only 13.1% of the total dispositions. The fora that are covered and make up those 13.1% are:

Table 3.4: Other contexts considered at the national statutory level

- Physical health (c.g. consent to treatment)	37.9%
- Employment and work relations	20.7%
- Mental health (c.g. consent to admission into a facility)	17.2%
- Family relations	10.3%
- Religion	6.9%
- Disability	3.4%
- Politics and policy-making	3.4%

It can be argued that the most interesting aspect in what refers to these various contexts (table 3.4) is that none of them is explicitly mentioned in article 12, thus constituting the countries’ own interpretation of participation in ‘all matters affecting the child’. Furthermore, as it can be seen in table 3.4, they involve both public – health, employment – and private instances – family, religion – which can also be seen as an advancement with regards to some of the instruments reviewed in previous levels. Still, it must be noted that in its periodic guidelines, the Committee (1996) alludes to some of these fora as potentially worthy of reporting, which might have, to some extent, influenced the countries to include them in their reports. It is, nonetheless, true that it remained the countries’ choice to explicitly address them or not, which may be taken as an indication of each country’s perceptions and attitudes on these matters. Due to their variety, they effectively convey the sense that whenever proceedings affecting the child in a variety of areas take place, he or she should be involved. The ways the countries conceive such involvement constitute the object of table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Type and beneficiaries of other provisions at the national statutory level

	No right	Recommendation	Enforceable right	Total
Child (no age limit)	2	4	4	10 (34.5%)
Child, depending on development	0	2	6	8 (27.6%)
A specific age is set	0	1	6	7 (24.1%)
Juvenile, teenager, adolescent	0	0	4	4 (13.8%)
Total	2 (6.9%)	7 (24.1%)	20 (69%)	29 (100%)

Two aspects are worth mentioning in what concerns the results presented in Table 3.5: a positive aspect is that almost 70% of its dispositions are conceived as enforceable rights, thus encompassing more applicability strength. The other feature, which concerns the ‘competence’ element, is that the dispositions seem to be more similarly distributed, with a lesser incidence of a specific age being set (24.1%), than in judicial and administrative proceedings. Furthermore, there is also an increment of measures which, without establishing a specific age, follow the same type of development-related formulation that was found in the UN Convention (27.6%). Finally, it is interesting to note that the majority of measures presented are addressed to all children (34.5%).

### 3.2.1.3. Participation in the educational context

Comprising 26.7% of the total dispositions on its own, Education is the second most important context considered by the countries as a forum for participation-oriented statutory dispositions. The impact of this number is even greater if one considers that, unlike judicial and administrative proceedings, the field of education is *not* explicitly mentioned in article 12. The position that proposes Education as a relevant field for child participation (Naval et al., 2002; Vibert et al., 2002) is, thus, given strength by these numbers.



It must be noted, though, that not all the countries contribute equally to the above-mentioned numbers: while some give very detailed accounts of their statutory measures in the field of Education, others do not even address it in their reports (see Appendix 3 for an account of the results of each specific country). As Pollard and Filer (1999, p.163) set forth it would seem that ‘educational provision in most countries has fallen short’ of the ideals established by international instruments. It is impossible to determine if there are no statutory measures in place in those countries, or if they just did not mention them. However, this exercise is one of general analysis and therefore, reference will be made to aggregated data.

Table 3.6: Elements composing the Education context at the national level and their incidence (in percentage)

<u>School</u> (general)	8.5%	- Influence school life and activities
<u>School</u> representation and expression	18.6%	- School publications - Student unions - National students associations - Choosing student reps - Student councils
<u>School</u> management	16.9%	- Seating in multipartite committees - Decisions on facilities and equipment - Selection of staff - Seating at school boards
<u>School</u> administrative	18.6%	- Curricula - Examinations - Creation of rules - School work plan - Student charters - Disciplinary measures
<u>Classroom</u>	3.4%	- Debating issues of interest - Class assemblies
<u>Individual</u> attendance of school	10.3%	- Attendance - Repeating a school year - Declaration of inability to attend - Exclusion
<u>Individual</u> planning and choices	23.7%	- Decisions regarding further education - Choice of school or vocational guidance - Individual Education Plans - Optional subjects - Assessment of Special Needs - Important decision involving pupil

The decision was taken to separately address the dispositions regarding children’s participation in each of the levels that composed the micro-levels of the framework

presented in chapter 1 (table 1.4): the *school*, the *classroom* and *individual* processes. Table 3.6 demonstrates the type of statutory measures put in place by the EU countries in those micro-levels, as well as their incidence in percentage.

One of the most interesting aspects that can be observed in table 3.6 is, once again, the diversity of the actual elements that compose the different education-related contexts. That diversity gives a good notion of all the potentially interesting indicators of children's participation in education. These elements will be further discussed ahead, as they constitute the object of chapter 4. Also observable is the fact that the global numbers referring to participation in the school context – over 60% – are higher than those regarding the classroom or individual procedures. Within the school level, however, if one considers the nature of the measures involved – i.e. the fact that most of them (18.6%) regard student representation – it can be concluded that they will not be inclusive of all the students. Although theoretically any student can be involved in these processes, it will necessarily be a minority of elected pupils who will actually take part in them. It is, then, all the more interesting to note that the highest-ranking element, on its own, is that of *individual* planning and choices (23.7%), for the scope of children it can attain is much vaster.

Another striking feature is the quasi-absence of statutory regulation pertaining to the classroom level (only 3.4% of the measures). This aspect gives strength to the position presented in chapter 1 (table 1.4) to the effect that this could be seen as a locus that will work more on the basis of a granted and exercised right to participation than of a statutory one.



Still, as a conclusion, it can be affirmed that a positive feature is that children’s right to participation is statutorily formulated in so many areas regarding education and that most of the measures are postulated as enforceable rights (67.8%, table 3.7). Another interesting and revealing factor, though, is to examine also to whom such dispositions are addressed. These elements are presented in table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Type and beneficiaries of educational provisions at the national statutory level

	Recommendation	Enforceable right	Total
Pupils (no age referred)	1	11	12 (20.3%)
Pupil, depending on development	0	3	3 (5.1%)
Post-primary school	15	22	37 (62.7%)
Juvenile, teenager, adolescent	0	1	1 (1.7%)
A students’ representative	3	3	6 (10.2%)
Total	19 (32.2%)	40 (67.8%)	59 (100%)

In order to be consistent with the organisation of the educational systems presented in the reports, it was decided to organise this section according to the context of education, i.e. by no longer referring to ‘children’, but to ‘pupils’ or ‘students’, as the reports do. This means that, this time, a distinction was made between measures that were addressed to ‘the pupils’ in general, as opposed to those that were destined to a specific type of pupils, i.e. primary or post-primary. However, in practice, when reviewing the reports, there was only one measure making an indirect reference to participation for primary school pupils, which is an interesting aspect in itself and will be discussed below. Owing to their quasi-absence though, primary school pupis will, for the purpose of this analysis, be encompassed by the general designation of ‘pupils’.

As it can be appreciated in table 3.7, a prominent aspect is the predominance of measures addressed at pupils from post-primary school levels (62.7%). The second most common formulation (20.3%) was that of ‘the pupils’ or ‘the students’, with no indication of a specific school level. Two interpretations can be made of this

formulation: one is that it addresses *all* the pupils, including those in primary school; the other is that set forth by Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997) – when discussing issues of competence – to the effect that the reporting agencies might have held an image of the students as a homogeneous body, modelled upon older students, and not acknowledging the variety of children the term ‘pupils’ or ‘students’ may encompass. The nature of the measures purported in this category leads to the inference that the latter was the case. This factor, as well as the predominance of measures addressed at post-primary pupils, support the affirmation that participation by primary school children is somewhat neglected in these reports, which can be said to reflect, once again, a conception of competence for participation as pertaining primarily and automatically to older children, i.e. a ‘pseudo-competence’ approach.

However, it can be argued that if this conception might be reasonable in other contexts, such as that of judicial proceedings – with the child’s best interest and their protection being invoked as an impediment for younger children’s participation – in the field of education those arguments are no longer valid (Lewis, 1996; Mortimer, 1996). Therefore, the absence of statutory measures regarding primary school children can be seen more as the result of reigning perceptions and attitudes towards children’s participation, which seem to be dominated by age-oriented criteria. This issue will also be further discussed in chapter 9 (section 9.4.).

### **3.2.2. Statutory right at Regional level**

When it comes to considering the legislated right to participation at this level, only two countries, Belgium and Spain, make a reference to their regional statutory measures.



The latter, in a total of seven – six of which are formulated as enforceable rights – are distributed as follows:

Table 3.8: Statutory right at regional level

	Welfare and social services	Criminal proceedings	Policy-making
Child (no age limit)	1	1	1
Child, depending on development	2	0	0
A specific age is set	1	1	0

As it happens at the National level there is here (table 3.8) a predominance of matters pertaining to judicial and administrative proceedings. However, the most striking aspect is necessarily the scarcity of statutory measures when compared with the National level. The fact that only two countries make reference to them gives credit to the suggestion that a statutory view of participation becomes less relevant when approaching the progressively more ‘micro’ aspects of the framework (table 1.4, chapter 1). Consequently – as will be seen ahead – this also supports the view of participation rights being represented at this level mainly through granted and exercised perspectives.

Still, it must be recalled that there are only five countries in the EU that have separate administrative regions, whose statutory measures they would potentially be inclined to address (although three countries do not refer specifically to participation measures). Other countries, being smaller or not having such administrative organisation might not have felt the need to address regional policy, but only national one. This element might help explain the low numbers of reported statutory measures at this level.

### 3.3. Granted and exercised rights to participation at the meso-levels

As the granted and exercised views of participation presented in the countries reports were quite similar, it was decided to present both National and Regional levels in a single section. However, a distinction has to be made between them: if at a Regional level granted and exercised measures are predominant – 17, against 7 statutory – the same cannot be said about the National level, which portrays only 39 different granted and exercised measures, in comparison with 221 dedicated to the statutory view. This seems to indicate that, while at the Regional level the granted and exercised views on the right to participation gain in importance, at the National level, a statutory view still prevails. Interestingly, this would be consistent with the articulation between views and levels that was proposed in the framework presented in chapter 1 (table 1.4).

Moreover, two of the countries do not even refer to granted or exercised measures at any of these levels. A possible explanation for this situation is that countries might experience some difficulties in translating legislated ideas of participation into practice (Datnow, 2002; Jupp, 1990; Saks, 1996). This may happen for a number of reasons: amongst them, there are those linked with incompatibilities between statutory measures, on the one side, and, on the other side, predominant societal conceptions and attitudes towards children's right to participation (Kaufman & Flekkøy, 1998). Examples of these incompatibilities can be found in the reports themselves, e.g.:

‘Portuguese legislation sets forth the idea that young people must be granted the right to be heard in all important matters affecting them. However, difficulties arise in implementing this idea, relating especially to cultural conceptions of the value of children's opinions and their proper place in the hierarchy of family members’ (Portugal's report, 1997).



This seems to reflect, in fact, the major difference between national and regional levels: while in the latter there is an anomie of statutory predicaments, in the former it appears that difficulties are experienced in translating well defined statutory frameworks into granted and exercised measures.

Notwithstanding the aspects mentioned above, the actual content of the dispositions reported as pertaining to granted and exercised rights is quite similar amongst the National and Regional levels, and therefore, from this point onwards, they will be jointly analysed. Fifty-eight measures were considered: as it happened in the statutory section, because only five of the countries have separate administrative regions, it is not surprising to verify that measures pertaining to the national level (39 or 67.2%), once again, more than double those referring to the regional level (17 or 29.3%).

As mentioned above, two countries make no reference at all to granted and exercised measures at these levels. Yet, it was considered that the absence of reference is as relevant as its presence and should be taken into account in the data analysis. For that reason this absence was also quantified and it accounts for 3.4% of the total measures. It is, therefore, interesting to compare these granted and exercised measures to whom they are addressed (i.e. to analyse the ‘competence’ element).

Table 3.9: Granted and exercised views at the national and regional levels and their beneficiaries.

	Granted right	Exercised right	Total
Child (no age limit referred)	27	7	34 (58.6%)
Child, depending on development	1	1	2 (3.4%)
A specific age is set	3	3	6 (10.3%)
Juvenile, teenager, adolescent	2	1	3 (5.2%)
A representative in the child’s name	4	7	11 (19%)
Total	37 (63.8%)	19 (32.8%)	56 (96.6%)

It is argued that at these levels, an exercised right has necessarily to be preceded by that right being granted to the child by an adult. Therefore, the criterion used to distinguish a granted right from an exercised one was the following: the exercised right referred to concrete measures, put in place by the different countries, in which children reportedly participate. In the case of the granted right, while a positive attitude towards participation is expressed, it is not indicated or there is no guarantee that those good intentions do, in fact, materialise into concrete actions involving children. This aspect is reinforced by the fact that most of these dispositions are formulated as general statements, such as ‘it is important that the child participates in...’, with no indication of specific circumstances where participation takes or has taken place.

With regards to the reports’ analysis, table 3.9 demonstrates a prevalence of measures formulated as granted rights over those presented as exercised rights, with the values of the former almost doubling the latter (63.8% against 32.8%). This seems to indicate that these countries do express more positive attitudes, than they actually put mechanisms in place allowing for children’s effective exercise of their participation rights.

Yet, a relevant aspect concerning the ‘competence’ element as presented in table 3.9 is that formulations which impose no age or developmental limits to the right, for the first time, surpass by far (58.6%) other types of more restrictive formulations. Nevertheless, prudence is of the essence when interpreting these apparently progressive results, for it is believed that these are more the result of the use of vague formulations, stating that ‘the child’ should participate in a certain event, than a conscious expression of a more encompassing attitude, approximating that of an ‘inalienable right’ view.



Finally, when compared with the dispositions of the statutory type, there is also an increase in the measures addressed to ‘a representative in the name of the child’ (19%). It is believed that this aspect is closely related to the nature of the contexts proposed for children’s granted and exercised participation at these levels, which can be appreciated in table 3.10:

Table 3.10: Contexts for granted and exercised participation at national and regional levels

	Frequency	Percentage
Special services (e.g. help-lines)	12	20.7%
Town councils and national parliaments	11	19%
Welfare and social services	9	15.5%
Student representation and expression	9	15.5%
Politics and policy-making	6	10.3%
Educational individual planning and choices	3	5.2%
Relations with parents	2	3.4%
Criminal proceedings	1	1.7%
Family	1	1.7%
Physical health	1	1.7%
School administrative	1	1.7%
Total	56	96.6%

In fact, when compared with the statutory dispositions, one can denote the appearance of two new categories in table 3.10: ‘special services’ and ‘councils and parliaments’. These are, by far, the strongest categories pertaining to the granted and exercised views as, together, they account for almost 40% of all the dispositions. This leads to the argument that they constitute a very good illustration of the nature of child participation at these levels, as conceived by the EU countries: one of these new categories – that of special services created for children (20.7%) – includes dispositions such as the creation of youth organisations, special opening hours of governmental offices, phone lines and help lines or child-friendly legal advice.

Interestingly, the results of the other category – that of the organisation of children’s town councils and national ‘mock-up’ parliaments (19%) – are corroborated by the literature as these processes are also referred as the strongest expressions of children’s

participation at the meso-levels (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Starkey, 1992). Some even wish that this sort of process abandon its informal and granted nature to become a statutory right for children. This wish is perceivable in one of the reports, in the present case with regards to children's 'town councils':

'The positive experience gained with the existing participation models had led to a fundamental discussion as to whether the 'informal participation models' for children currently being set up on the basis of the goodwill of individual city mayors and 'city fathers' should be given a legal standing, so that they can be embodied institutionally' (Austria's report, 1997).

As it is set forth in this quote, these processes are very much dependent on adults in power positions granting to children the access to such fora. It is difficult, then, to draw the line between an exclusively granted approach and children's actual exercise of their participation rights. This type of approach can be appreciated in comments such as the following:

'Knowledge of children's views has had a positive influence to date. One example of this was the Children's Parliament, which met on 1 July 1997 in the Assembly of the Republic; *an initiative in which children participated and the symbolic significance of which aroused curiosity and sympathy on the part of public opinion and the media*' (Portugal's report, 1997, emphasis added).

It is impossible not to mention the somewhat patronising stance of the last sentence, which might give credit to some of the criticism addressed towards this type of event, namely with regards to their appropriateness as loci for children's exercise of participation rights (Gale *et al.*, 1999): Hart and Schwab (1997) are amongst those who discuss the nature of these processes – some of which have been in place for many years in a number of EU countries – calling once again the attention to the quality of



children's participation and to the issue of selection procedures. These authors reinforce the idea that these fora should only be complementary to a genuine exercised participation in everyday life and not constitute the centre of the 'pro-child-participation' efforts.

Finally, this section would not be complete without a reference to granted and exercised rights in the field of Education: as it can be seen in table 3.10, these seem to be mostly accounted for by the 'student representation and expression' category (15.5.%), which at these levels, is portrayed by references to students' national associations and unions. As it happened with the statutory measures, the current ones seem to be dedicated mostly to post-primary students and, for that matter, only to a minority of elected representatives. Therefore, it can be affirmed that, at these levels, granted and exercised views seem to be generally characterised by representation and self-advocacy movements.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

It could be noted in this chapter, particularly with regards to the National level, that the modalities proposed for the development of child participation are still very much dominated by a statutory view. The latter is chiefly expressed in three contexts that have been analysed: that of judicial and administrative proceedings, that of other various proceedings and that of education. As it happened at the macro-levels, in the three cases, the right to participation appears to be denied to some children on the basis of developmental factors. These restrictions are expressed either by the establishment of specific age limits or by awarding the right to the child only when its development is judged as appropriate. Both expressions entail a type of restriction which is not in line

with an ‘inalienable right’ view on these issues as they portray a *restrictive* rather than an *adaptive* approach.

Still, a positive feature of the meso-levels is that granted and exercised views are reportedly more expressive than in the macro-levels, especially at the regional level. These assume two major expressions, which seem to be specific of the meso-levels: that of special services for children and that of the institution of national children’s parliaments or town councils. However, a problem subsists in that there are few guarantees that statutory and granted rights, at these levels, are actually translating into exercised participation by a majority of children. This reinforces the position that it is still not the meso-levels’ fora that possess optimal characteristics for the generalised exercise of children’s participation rights. It is argued that the aforementioned optimal characteristics pertain more specifically to the loci found in micro-levels and, therefore, these will constitute the object of the next chapter.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Participation at the micro-levels: School / Classroom / Individual**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter proposes an assessment of child participation at the micro-levels and in the loci they encompass, as it is believed these hold great potential for the development of exercised participation. In fact, it was suggested in the preceding chapters, that the loci found at the macro- and meso-levels did not encompass the best conditions for the implementation of exercised participation. It was also argued that, at those levels, the views of participation being put forward were mainly rhetorical and statutory and that granted and exercised views were not of paramount concern. However, from a psycho-educational perspective, the latter are indeed the most important views to explore as it is believed they are those that can have the most impact in children's lives (Hart & Schwab, 1997).

The current chapter will, therefore, start by justifying the importance of the micro-levels, such as the family or the school, with regards to the development of participation (Hammersley, 1993, 1994c). Although several fora, at the micro-levels would be interesting for the study of child participation, it is believed that the school offers exceptional conditions both for the research and for the implementation of exercised participation. Subsequently, the chapter will focus on the rationale to the effect that the school, and particularly the primary school, is a locus that possesses both the necessary 'capacity' for potentially high levels of participation and for the development of research in this domain (Covell & Howe, 1999; Jordan & Goodet, 1996).

Further to the argument that the school is a good locus for the development of participation, a similar analysis to that of previous chapters will take place, i.e. it will be assessed how statutory, granted and exercised views can relate or have related in the past, within the school context. A point will be made to the effect that there has been an over-evaluation of the potential of exclusively statutory measures as agents of change, especially following the UN Convention (Fields & Narr, 1992). The appropriateness of a solely statutory approach will be contested on two fronts: one relates to its strength – or lack of it – with regards to the implementation of participation; and the other involves its limitations as an explicative factor for the existence of high levels of participation in certain contexts. Examples of contexts that suffer virtually no influence of participation-oriented statutory measures, but where high levels of granted and exercised participation can be found, will be provided to support the above mentioned argument. The need to go *beyond Conventions* – which is used as a metaphor for the need to go beyond a statutory view on participation – is therefore proposed: on the one hand, as explained above, because it is believed that these views are not the most efficient means to achieve high levels of exercised participation, and, on the other hand, because they do not seem to be powerful enough to hold enough explanatory power to justify those high levels of participation.

The chapter will, therefore, end by proposing the need to consider other *factors* – i.e. other than statutory measures – that may influence the development of granted and exercised participation in primary school. Examples of these potential factors will be provided. It is suggested, nonetheless, that prior to discussing what influences them, granted and exercised views of participation have to be well defined and operationalised and that this exercise has not yet been performed (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997). A proposed means to achieve that definition and operationalisation is the development of



*indicators* of granted and exercised participation in primary school (Casas, 1997; Saks, 1996). The arguments to support this proposal will be presented, as will be examples of potentially interesting types of indicators. Finally, these latter aspects, i.e. the development of *indicators* of granted and exercised participation as well as the *factors* that may influence that participation, will also be presented as the elements which will occupy the empirical part of the study.

#### **4.2. The relevance of the micro-levels: family and the school**

As mentioned above, micro-levels – such as the family and the school – have often been indicated as those where granted and exercised rights could potentially gain expression (Hart, 1992; Hester et al., 2003). Indeed, it is interesting to note that even the statutory dispositions set forth at the macro- and meso-levels (see chapters 2 and 3) were, for the most part, intended for application in micro-levels' fora, such as judicial proceedings, the family or the school (Brown & Harrison, 1998; Kobus, 1992; Saks, 1996). Whether they succeeded in that effort to promote greater levels of granted and exercised participation in those contexts is an issue that will be discussed later.

Notwithstanding this, the significance of the micro-levels' fora can certainly not be ignored (Print et al., 2002). It would not be possible, however, to study all possible contexts within these micro-levels. Therefore, the focus of this study will be on the school and, particularly, on the educational processes of primary-school children. The rationale for this choice is presented in the following section, where the reasons regarding why the school can be considered as a locus with the 'capacity' for potentially high levels of granted and exercised participation are also discussed.

The fact that this choice of locus had to be made does not mean, however, that family settings would not also make for interesting and pertinent research fields (Stalford, 2002; Tomanovic'-Mihalovic', 2000). As Sutherland (1992) argues, the mechanisms of participation within the family context are not fully understood as well, and the reasons behind that might be linked with a certain difficulty both in *accessing* and *assessing* participation in that setting. In fact, the author supports her affirmation with examples of two very concrete situations. Attention is drawn to the fact that:

‘Decisions taken within the family setting (...) are rarely subject to scrutiny. The extent to which the children involved have been consulted is not known. Thus, for example, when a family moves to live in a different area or when a particular bedtime is determined in a children’s home, the decision is taken and implemented. The children involved may have taken an active part in that decision or they may have taken none at all’ (Sutherland, 1992, p.155).

This author claims, therefore, that there is also a need for research of family-related processes, for they too hold great potential both for the study and the implementation of granted and exercised views of participation. However, it is believed that both the issues of accessibility and of a potentially higher ‘visibility’ of school-related processes (Badran, 1996, cited in Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997) – as well as the aspects presented below (section 4.3.) – demonstrate the appropriateness of the school context, not only as a research locus, but also as an interesting forum for the exercise of participation rights. The qualities this context possesses – when compared with the criticisms that were previously pointed out at the macro- and meso-levels – shall now be analysed as it is believed they provide a good foundation for the decision to base this study on the school context.



### **4.3. Rationale for considering the school as a good locus for granted and exercised participation**

When the macro- and meso-levels were presented, several criticisms were pointed out to the fora they held. These criticisms have helped, by opposition, to outline and compile the conditions that a forum should possess in order to have a good ‘capacity’ for potentially high levels of ‘exercised’ participation:

4.3.1. It should be a good locus for learning and experiencing democracy and citizenship (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Holden, 1998; Print et al., 2002);

4.3.2. It should cover the majority of children, and not a select few, and its activities should be accessible to all, with no limitations based on presumed ‘competence’ (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990; Trainor, 2002);

4.3.3. It should be part of children’s everyday life and experience and not a ‘one-off’ event (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997).

It is believed that the school context responds to all these conditions. Again, it should be remembered that, while other views are defensible, the arguments presented herein fall within the ‘inalienable right’ view on these issues, which has been used as a reference throughout this thesis, and that they are necessarily approached from a psycho-educational perspective.

#### **4.3.1. The school is a good locus for learning and experiencing democracy and citizenship**

Although some consider it a value in itself (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997), participation is also often portrayed as a vehicle or expression of democracy and citizenship (Nader, 1992; Naval et al., 2002; Print & Coleman, 2003). The school is, then, perceived by

many (e.g. Alderson, 1999; Fernekes, 1992; Ukpokodu, 1997) as a valuable locus for the implementation of such values. In fact, 'the institution of school, whether it be pre-school, kindergarten or the early primary grades, is the next major site [after the family] where children experience the exercise of power' (Howard & Gill 2000, p.363). This is all the more relevant because, according to the 'inalienable right' view, the exercise of participation is also one of democratic power-sharing and partnership within a community made up of adults and children (Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Lindsay, 2003). Therefore, when 'looking at where to begin in fostering young people's understanding and experience of democratic participation, the schools would seem to be an obvious place. The schools are thought of as an integral part of the community and, of course, many of our great educational philosophers have argued that it is here that the seeds of true democracy are sown (...)' (John, 1996, pp. 13-14).

It is indeed common to see this type of analogy being made between school and the larger society: some maintain that the school is, actually, a 'micro-cosmos' of society, i.e. that 'schools are mini-societies that reflect the world at large and part of children's education is to learn to live in the school community, a process which will prepare them for adult life' (Holden, 1998, p.56).

One approach to these issues is, then, that children should learn about democracy and citizenship in school because that will be helpful in preparing them for adult life (Ippoliti, 1998; Tanner, 1998; Vibert et al., 2002). However, others criticise this view on the basis that it supports mostly 'an Education *for* citizenship, not *of* young citizens, [which] presents citizenship as an adult state and a set of legal rights, duties and systems, learned as a body of pure but-yet-to-be-applied knowledge. This approach presents rights [for instance] as rather remote concerns and not as exciting important



topics of central interest to students' lives' (Alderson, 1999, p.194). The alternative conception is, therefore, that the school should not limit itself to teaching children *about* democracy and citizenship in view of a *future* exercise of rights (Hart, 1992; Print & Coleman, 2003). Instead, it is argued that the school context holds the potential for *implementing* democratic proceedings and participation in its everyday functioning (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997; Wood, 1998) and, therefore, promote the above-mentioned education *of* young citizens (Hodgson, 1996; Print, Ørnstrøm & Skovgaard Nielsen, 2002).

In Hart and Schwab's (1997, p.184) view, children need to know, therefore, 'that they are not only preparing themselves for participating as adult citizens, [but that] they are also participating right now'. This view embodies the perspective of a 'citizen-child' and not only of the 'child-as-a-future-citizen' (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). In order to achieve the purpose of a genuine exercise of democracy and citizenship in the school, two basic aspects are proposed in the literature: the first is that these issues have to be *explicitly* addressed in schools (Shiman, 1992; Print et al., 2002). It is believed that, if they are not explicitly addressed, the risk is run that well-intentioned participation-oriented proceedings and gestures lose their learning value because the reasons for their existence are not clear to the children. Howard and Gill (2000) provide an account – which stems from their experience in Australian schools – that exemplifies particularly well this situation. The authors argue that:

'(...) Schooling processes can be highly instrumental in developing student awareness about government and democracy. Teachers in Australian classrooms routinely use the democratic techniques of consultation, group decision making, negotiation, voting for office bearers and so on. Often, however, these techniques are seen simply as good classroom management practices and not as valuable teaching opportunities. As a

consequence, children's understanding of democratic principles and purposes are not extended because they are rarely made explicit in the classroom context. As adults we should take every opportunity to explain why we are adopting particular democratic practices' (Howard & Gill, 2000, p.378).

Complementarily to the need of rendering participation-oriented gestures and procedures explicit to children, some authors insist also on the fact that democratic principles – more than being addressed as a curricular subject – should be the essence of the school's *ethos* (Holden & Clough, 1998). Wood (1998, p.38) strongly suggests that 'participation by young children needs to extend beyond the taught curriculum. The school environment can also be a fruitful area for encouraging the skills of collaboration and negotiation which are essential to citizenship'. According to Osler and Starkey (1998, p.313), this can be achieved '(...) not only by educating children about their rights, as part of the formal school curriculum, but also by [schools] establishing themselves as model human rights communities (...)’ developing, hence, a whole-school participation-oriented policy and practice.

#### **4.3.2. The school reaches a vast number of children and its activities can be made accessible to all**

When addressing the issue of exercised participation in macro- and meso-levels it was argued that one of the problems associated with that exercise was the limited number of children that were actually involved (John, 1996). Furthermore, it was observed that it was mostly children who were perceived by adults as possessing an extraordinary level of 'competence', e.g. being very articulate (Hart & Schwab, 1997), that were participating at those levels.



It is believed that the school as a locus can overcome both these criticisms. In fact, at least in the case of the industrialised countries which were described in the previous chapters, it reaches necessarily more than ‘a select group of children’ (Hart & Schwab, 1997, p.188): UNICEF’s (2001) data on both primary school attendance (96% in industrialised countries; 83% world total) and completion rates (99% in industrialised countries; 75% world total) provide an indication that, even if there are discrepancies between countries, the primary school is a locus frequented by the majority of children.

Far more complicated is the aspect of rendering activities accessible to all children (Pollard & Filer, 1999) notably because of issues surrounding the notion of ‘pseudo-competence’ for exercising participation. Throughout this review, it has been mentioned that ‘competence’ is often associated in the literature as being inferred *a priori* from other variables, such as children’s maturity, age or being considered as having SEN. It has also been argued that, in macro- and meso- levels, mainly through a statutory view, there has been a certain discrimination in the access to exercised participation (Davis & Watson, 2000; DfES, 2001; Jones & Marks, 1997), against children not corresponding to pre-established developmental (Weisz & Tomkins, 1996) or other ‘pseudo-competence’ criteria (Alderson, 1999).

However, if arguments concerning the safeguarding of children’s best interests and their protection could be used in those contexts to justify such discrimination, it is suggested that they lose strength when it comes to the school context (Fletcher & Gordon, 1994; Lewis, 1996; Mortimer, 1996). In fact, Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997) find it legitimate to question the existence of this type of discrimination. Their reflection in the case presented concerns the issue of ‘student councils’ but it is believed that it could be extended to other school proceedings. These authors draw attention to the fact that ‘in

some communities student councils do not exist at all. In others, the student council only includes delegates from the upper levels, and *it is reasonable to ask why the younger ones are not there*. The process by which representatives are chosen (not necessarily elected) can be questioned, as can the decision-making power of the student body' (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.111, emphasis added).

Pursuing an 'inalienable right' view on these issues implies that the right to exercise participation in the school context can and should be accessible to all children, thus challenging these 'pseudo-competence' approaches. As mentioned above, this assertion is valid, on the one hand, for the participation of young children in primary schools, as opposed to it becoming accessible only in secondary schools (which is the position adopted in most statutory measures in European countries, see chapter 3). On the other hand, the argument is also valid for the participation of children designated as having SEN.

Both cases find support in the literature: in what refers to the participation of young children, Holden (1998) provides some examples, originating from primary schools, which give credit to the assertion that these children can participate efficiently and that 'age' should not be used as a criterion to deny them the access to participation rights. The author elaborates firstly on her assessment of a primary school where a pupil council was operating and argues that 'the fact that the youngest pupils were involved and had the confidence to speak out belies the opinion of many teachers that school councils cannot operate effectively until secondary school. The enthusiasm of the children to act also indicates that whilst a teacher must provide some initial input and guidance, there is sufficient interest and ability amongst pupils themselves to find solutions and work for effective change' (Holden, 1998, p.58). Another case Holden



(1998) observed was that of a primary school in which, 'as well as a school council, democratic processes extended to pupils interviewing prospective teachers and classroom assistants, mediating in playgroup disputes and discussing school's development with the headteacher. [Once again,] It is interesting to note that such examples come from primary rather than secondary schools' (Holden, 1998, p.59).

It is also suggested that if it is possible and desirable to achieve exercised participation in school for young, primary-aged children, the same arguments are pertinent in the case of children designated as having SEN (Owen & Tarr, 1998; Wade & Moore, 1993) and that this variable should also not be used as an *a priori* cause for discrimination. Indeed, 'it would seem that adults have a duty to encourage and support children with special educational needs to put forward their own thoughts and opinions about their needs, and [about] the provision that might best meet those needs. Yet, conventionally, children have usually been passive in this process' (Gersch, Holgate & Sigston, 1993, p.38).

More recently, however, the tendency is developing towards alternative views on this matter. A good example of a document following this tendency is the British Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) which proposes that the latter need not be the case: it puts forward the idea that the *right* to participation in the school should never be put in question, for *any* child. It is rather its *modalities* that need to be adapted to each child (Rose, 1991) and the activities 'modified in ways that will increase each student's chances of successful participation' (Helion & Fry, 1995, p.57). This can be carried out taking into attention the child's age (Holden, 1998) and/ or their designated SEN (Davis, 1996; Fergusson, 1994). The approach taken is, therefore, *adaptive* and *flexible* rather than *restrictive*.

Beyond the conception that it is the modalities of participation that need to be adapted to each child (DfES, 2001), a notion that might be helpful in such cases is that of participation as a *continuum* (Gersch, 1987). Gersch (1987, p.157) argues that ‘(...) it may be useful to consider involvement along a continuum, with ‘minimum child activity’ at one end and ‘maximum child activity’ at the other. One should thus be considering ways of gradually and incrementally increasing the active engagement of pupils’. The underlying implication is that one should ‘consider the degree of pupil involvement at present and to enquire whether a greater degree of involvement is possible (...)’ (Gersch, 1987, p.166). If this notion is followed, it may be argued that even children with severe learning difficulties can exert control (Smith, 1994; Wilkinson, 1994) and actively participate in their learning processes (Hardwick & Rushton, 1994; Rose, McNamara & O’Neil, 1996).

Without the intention of being exhaustive, it is believed that a good illustration of how efforts in activity adaptation can result in higher levels of exercised participation for children designated as having SEN is that provided by Erickson’s and Koppenhaver’s (1995) work on communication. One of the situations to which they refer is that where, in an effort to increase the level of participation of children with severe learning difficulties in reading and writing, ‘whenever possible the therapist allowed the children to use communication boards to indicate choices for the activities. For example, instead of predetermining a sequence for the activities involved in a therapy session, the therapist encouraged the students to choose the order in which they completed activities’ (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 1995, p.679). This situation is an illustration of how ‘the combined use of technology and child-centered instruction (...) resulted in the active participation of severely disabled students in reading and writing activities’



(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 1995, p.676). This case refers to individual processes, but the same type of support has been used effectively to promote the participation of children with various developmental characteristics in larger school, such as school councils and class assemblies (Holden, 1998; Lown, 2002; Trainor, 2002).

Although this is just one example, the larger conception to be derived from it is, on the one hand, that the right to exercise participation in school should never be put in question and that, on the other hand, schools have the ‘capacity’ and should seek ways to make participation a reality for all children attending them (Cooper, 1993; Holden, 1998). Pridmore (2000, p.111) provides an interesting conclusion for this issue when arguing that:

‘It is not enough just to ‘invite’ children to participate in school (...). Schools need to find ways to make children, teachers, and parents feel comfortable as children, traditionally the least powerful members in many societies, are encouraged to form their own opinions and to express their own views as well as to have more control over planning and carrying out (...) activities around the school and in the community’.

#### **4.3.3. The school is part of children’s everyday life and experience**

Some authors consider that the importance of participation becoming a ‘reality in children’s daily experience’ (Wood, 1998, p.35) cannot be stressed enough. In fact, many of the previously mentioned fora, such as international conferences (Hart, 1992), national councils (Hart & Schwab, 1997) or mock-up democratic fora (Hart, 2002), have been criticised for their artificial and *ad-hoc* nature (Gale *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, it is these authors’ view that participation must be put in practice in fora that children

attend regularly (Casas, 1997) and not be lived in single events as a ‘token democratic aberration’ (Hart & Schwab, 1997).

It is suggested, therefore, that the school – as a forum which is familiar to children and where they evolve and interact with each other and with adults everyday – has the ‘capacity’ to overcome the above mentioned criticism (Holden, 1998). Hart and Schwab (1997, p.188) also support this view. This is quite noticeable when they discuss, for instance, the relevance of ‘children’s councils’: they argue that ‘we need to go beyond the idea of children’s councils as a special kind of activity, and hence, probably, a media event. We need to think of them as absolutely basic to the functioning of a democracy and to children’s daily experience’. According to these authors, one way to render this possible is by ‘making democratic involvement into a general school practice’ (Hart & Schwab, 1997, p.188).

In order to attain this purpose, some authors insist on the fact that participatory events and activities should focus primarily on the children’s *tangible reality* (John, 1996). This caveat is necessary because, in certain school contexts, an *apparent* participation-oriented *ethos* might be observed, without the activities proposed actually having a meaning for the children involved (Wood, 1998). Alderson (1999, p.196) warns, for instance, against the dangers of using programmes where ‘international perspectives are taught *instead of*, rather than *as well as*, rights in schools, and divert all attention away from rights in schools. Teachers may feel satisfied that they are covering human rights fully, while pupils may become more disconcerted and sceptical about the gaps between the rhetoric and reality of rights in their own lives’. The author goes on to illustrate the latter aspect through the words of an 8-year-old who, somewhat humorously, states that: ‘It’s so boring when they keep telling you that making the world a better place means



picking up litter and not killing whales...' (Alderson, 1999, pp.194-195). This type of comment depicts how a lack of meaning can make children detached and disenchanted about activities, which were certainly well-meant at their origin, but that did not come forward as pertinent to the children's reality.

Another example of such activities and of the importance of participation addressing children's tangible reality is put forward by Hart and Schwab (1997): they criticise – quite vigorously – a school activity that consisted of having a mock-up of the U.S. Presidential Elections, with children pretending to be the actual candidates (on the occasion, Bill Clinton and Bob Dole). The authors state that this is a type of activity that is focused on something distant from the children and on issues of which they have little knowledge. Their argument is that the children 'should [rather] be having elections about things they know lots about, namely, their own lives and the lives of their schools, real democracy (...). This mock democracy, mock elections, it's a way of playing safe, to avoid getting into some of the tricky and morally challenging issues of local politics that one faces in genuine democratic process' (Hart & Schwab, 1997, p.177).

That local participation stemming from children's own interests and experience is possible to attain in school is the main contention of this section. To support this argument, Nader's (1992) description of three cases of student civic participation will now be presented. This is necessarily a short presentation, provided as an example among many possible:

- 1- In the first case a group of children worried about hazardous waste dump near their school. They rallied community and government support for their cause and managed to get the resources to clean the dump.

2- In another case, a civic movement started with one student's concern for the use of polystyrene trays in the school cafeteria. She discussed the issue with her colleagues and teachers. They lobbied the school board and it eventually replaced them by re-usable trays. The students' movement later spread throughout the school district.

3- Finally, students took on developers who were threatening the last stand of cypress trees in their state. They collected signatures, spoke at city council meeting and there was a vote that backed up the students. The movement they started has spread to schools in five other U.S. states and even overseas.

The author mentions that the most important aspect related with these examples was that 'in all cases, the teachers encouraged their students to take responsibility for community problems, to come up with solutions, and to follow through on changes' (Nader, 1992, p.213), which supports the point that it is possible to achieve meaningful exercised participation in the school context.

As a conclusion, if it seems legitimate to affirm that the school is a locus holding the 'capacity' for exercised participation, that is, nonetheless, still a potentiality, a rhetoric argument. The rhetoric argument constitutes, undoubtedly, a first step but it does not guarantee, on its own, that exercised participation is actually taking place. As it has been mentioned – for instance with regards to the UN Convention – 'the problem is that all of the momentum toward human rights remains at the level of ideology. While the rhetoric is not without importance, it is a double-edged sword; while spiritually uplifting, it also deludes us into accepting a very rosy picture of the New World Order – a world order of a billion points of light; a kinder, gentler world order' (Fields & Narr, 1992, p.1).

More recently, some have argued, therefore, that having already lived the euphoria of the initial years of the internationally legislated right to participation, in which much



was written on the subject from a rhetorical point of view, the debate and research efforts should concentrate on the actual application and exercise by children of their participation rights, namely in the school (Hammad, 1999; Kaufman & Flekkøy, 1998). They suggest that those efforts should be focused on determining what participation should and can look like in practice. As seen in chapter 3, one of the responses to this question has been the adoption of participation-oriented statutory measures at the school level. As in previous chapters, the relationship between statutory, granted and exercised views will now be discussed with regards to the school context.

#### **4.4. Relationship between statutory, granted and exercised rights at the School level**

When it comes to the relationship between statutory measures directed at the school (as those presented in chapter 3), on the one hand, and granted and exercised rights, on the other, if one follows a legalistic approach, it would seem legitimate to expect the level of statutory measures to be directly proportional to the level of granted and exercised participation (Osler & Starkey, 1998; Smith, 1998). This would imply that a context that which would be under the influence of extensive statutory measures, would also portray high levels of granted and exercised rights and vice-versa. However, if an exclusively statutory approach is proposed, there is the danger of falling into the trap indicated at other levels: that is the trap of proposing prescriptions with a certain dose of determinism, and take them for exercised participation, when they are actually not translated into concrete action.

As mentioned above, the latter case was actually quite patent, for instance, in the years immediately following the adoption of the UN Convention, namely with regards to

participation in school contexts. It has been noted that its supporters, who were concomitantly and – maybe above all – children’s rights advocates (John, 1998), were exhilarated by the achievement of finally having a globally widespread, legally binding instrument addressing, among other rights, that of child participation (Verhellen, 1993). It is, therefore, quite common, in those early dates, to detect very enthusiastic affirmations, such as:

‘All over the world, campaigns to promote the convention have included children. Schools have picked up the theme of participation, and teachers have used the convention to inform children of their rights, to develop their understanding of children living under conditions different from their own, and to teach the dynamics of international cooperation’ (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1992, p.216).

Nowadays, comments like these – which translate a perhaps too optimistic view of the extent of action of the Convention or other participation-oriented statutory measures – have to be analysed with prudence and put into perspective (Harris-Short, 2003; Morrow, 1999). And this is mostly because the above-referred logic is often discredited in reality. Examples can be found in the literature of multiple contexts that, while being ‘rich’ in statutory provisions, portray nonetheless low levels of granted and exercised participation (Armstrong, 2003; Gentry, Gable & Rizza, 2002). One such example is provided by Ochaíta and Espinosa (1997):

‘In referring to the role of the school, in our opinion, it is necessary to work towards a greater dialogue with more participation on the part of children. In spite of legislative and social advances, which undoubtedly have been produced in most of Europe (such as, for example, child and adolescent participation on the school councils), we still have a long way to go towards facilitating communication between children and adults within the educational context. When we interview children, which the Council of Europe did (Madrid



1994), on the real possibilities of participation in school decisions which affected them, they responded the following: children think that, *although in many countries the law allows them to participate in school councils, this always happens under unpropitious conditions, where real participation is impossible*: they are in a minority with respect to adults, and feel overwhelmed by their presence. The language used and the topics discussed in these meetings do not let children participate' (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997, p.290-291, emphasis added).

Other examples of this type of situation can be found in the reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child discussed in chapter 3. One can take, for instance, the case of Sweden, which is one of the countries that reports to have put in place statutory measures regarding children's participation in educational contexts. Even in this official – and, therefore, potentially favourably biased – report, it is recognised that:

*'Despite these regulations, various studies have shown that pupils do not exert any real influence on teaching. Several studies have shown that many pupils feel unconcerned with what goes on in the classroom, do not feel that they are seen and heard, do not derive any enjoyment from teaching and do not feel that they are doing anything worthwhile. Many find teaching monotonous and predictable. They cannot influence the organization and content of teaching to any great extent, they do not have a hand in choosing teaching materials and they cannot influence tests and homework. There are great differences between individual schools, but the overall results are disheartening'* (Sweden's report, 1998, emphasis added).

Therefore, it becomes clear that although both rhetorical arguments and legal approaches have their place in shaping children's participation rights, one has to go beyond these views if the purpose is both to understand and achieve children's actual exercise of those rights (Stone, 2002). It is believed that the problem, up to this moment, resides in that most of the literature has concentrated on these two views,

either rhetorical or legal, and has neglected the practice (Burman, 2003). Furthermore – and perhaps more worryingly – the existence of measures has many times been presented as, and mistaken for, the existence of exercised participation (Smith, 2002).

As Kisser (1996, p.413) suggests ‘there is no doubt that the legal framework for Austrian schools [for instance] guarantees children’s rights and pupil participation. But laws are only the premises and participation must not stop at the theoretical level; it has to be put into practice’. The goal of this section, though, was that of trying to explain why both rhetorical and an exclusively legal approaches are not enough to ensure exercised participation for children. If the examples provided are believed to discredit the above-mentioned logic, which suggests that a high statutory influence leads to high levels of granted and exercised participation in the school, perhaps an even more flagrant contradiction of that logic is that the latter seem to exist also in contexts which are ‘poor’ in statutory measures.

#### **4.4.1. Granted and exercised participation in statutorily ‘poor’ contexts**

In order to address this aspect, this section will start by arguing that the notion of ‘participation in education’ is certainly neither a novelty, nor has it emerged spontaneously in the 1990’s through the influence of the UN Convention or other statutory measures. In fact, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a plethora of ideas and pedagogical theories based on participation-oriented principles have emerged (Atkinson & Delamont, 1984; Hameline, Jornot & Belkaïd, 1995): Some of these have assumed the name of their main thinkers, while others were named after the method or technique they proposed; some have lasted to the present day, while others have been judged outdated for a long time; some have managed to pass on some of their ideas to a



mainstream current of thought, while others were driven into a dogmatism and intransigence that have certainly contributed to their fall. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that they all have, to a large extent, helped shape modern pedagogical thinking.

In the following pages, two tables describe some of these theories and methods. As it would be impossible to make a description of 100+ years of educational history within this type of exercise, these tables are inevitably summarised. However, the importance of these theories and methods with regards to the contemporary thinking about child participation is such (Print et al., 2002), that it would be impossible not to address them. The tables do not intend to be exhaustive and have been restricted to addressing only the main ideas of each theory. Their main purpose is to demonstrate the presence of participation-oriented ideas and methods even in contexts that did not suffer the influence of statutory measures. To that effect, table 4.1 focuses on more ‘classic’ ideas while table 4.2 tries to express some of the more ‘modern’ ideas.

Table 4.1: Overview of ‘classic’ participation-oriented educational theories and methods

Dewey (1859-1952)	Dewey proposes that ‘democracy should be a ‘way of life’ and an individual’s learning should be explicitly connected to experience (...). [Therefore], individual participation and active engagement are essential to learning’ (Hart <i>et al.</i> , 1997, p.46). ‘He believed that the school should prepare the child for active participation in the life of the community: he believed that education must break down, rather than reinforce, the gap between the experience of schooling and the needs of a truly participatory democracy’ (Flanagan, 1994). ‘Dewey’s concern was [also] with fostering the imagination and the development of social relationships’ (Enright & Cox, 1997).
Montessori (1870-1952)	Montessori ‘believed that no human being is educated by another person. He [sic] must do it himself or it will never be done. She felt, therefore, that the goal of early childhood education should not be to fill the child with facts from pre-selected course studies, but rather to cultivate his own natural desire to learn. (...) [The Montessori classroom allows to] the child freedom to select individual activities which correspond to his own periods of interest (...). The teacher is a guide, allowing experimentation, discovery and analysis without adult intervention. A Montessori teacher is passive and provides the child with opportunities and guidance’ (Enright & Cox, 1997).
The ‘Active School’ and the ‘New Education’ (1920’s)	The first known use of the term comes from a group working at the ‘Institut Rousseau’ in Geneva, around 1917, which included theorists such as Claparède, Bovet or Ferrière. The latter would later on claim to be the main creator of the method (Hameline <i>et al.</i> , 1995). At first, especially for Claparède, the paradigm was to ‘attach the child’s activity to the satisfaction of a need which expresses itself in the form of an interest’ (Hameline <i>et al.</i> , 1995, p.12, translated). Then, ‘a school shall be called ‘active’, when the pupils become the main actors (...) and when the mobilisation of intellectual activity is done from ‘the interior towards the exterior’ and not the other way around. There is the belief that an activity stemming ‘spontaneously’ from the pupil is ‘naturally’ superior to one which he submits himself to’ (Hameline <i>et al.</i> , 1995, p.36, translated). However, as Ferrière mentions, the child ‘should nonetheless, be oriented by the teacher in that action, which is still conceived as spontaneous. The teacher should create the ‘conditions for spontaneity’: Everything, even the programme itself, should stem from the pupils’ spontaneous initiative – of course, that initiative is to be suggested, oriented and defined by the teacher’ (Ferrière, 1921 cited in Hameline <i>et al.</i> , 1995, p.35, translated).
Freinet (1896-1966) and the ‘Modern School’	‘He published his major works at a time when the impetus of New Education was slowing down (...). His publications constitute a radical critique of the traditional public education system [and have conducted to the conception of the ‘modern school’]. Freinet’s approach was not only theoretical and political but also very practical since he integrated his ideas into his daily work in the classroom’ (Schlemminger, 1996). Freinet’s proposes daily activities based on ‘collective work, field trips, producing free texts, doing exchanges with other schools, the workshop-class where each of them [pupils] would be accomplishing a task, the school council’s meeting where the organisation of each day was discussed. No more grammar lessons, but rather an exigency of quality, manifested by the pupils themselves (...) which made the grammar come out as a necessity of communication. No more externally imposed discipline, but an authentic order, the one of organised work’ (Meirieu, 1992, p.35, translated). ‘Besides the collective activities, there were also in his class: an acquisition programme, a weekly and monthly individual work plan, to which each child was contractually bound. He emphasised that these plans would guarantee each child’s progression, in an individualised fashion, with his own rhythm, with different support according to his tastes and interests’ (Meirieu, 1992, p.36, translated).
A.S. Neill’s (1883-1973) Summerhill	In a somewhat different line, Summerhill, founded in 1921 (Neill, 1960, 1970), is described ‘not really as a school, but rather a home, a way of living (...): [there are] assemblies every Saturday (...). Then, there is the report from the tribunal, which is in charge of the application of the regulations and penalties during the week; the tribunal is designated every week by the general assembly. But, mainly, the rules of living in the school are discussed. (...) At Summerhill, the classes are not compulsory; each one decides whether he [sic] is going to the class and what subjects he follows’ (Meirieu, 1992, pp.45-46, translated). However, in spite of this liberal approach ‘Neill had an aversion for the ‘new teaching methods’; the classes at Summerhill were alike those in other schools. Therefore, the choice had been to wait that the child desires to learn, that he manifests the will and takes the necessary steps by himself, rather than looking into rendering the teaching as something desirable’ (Meirieu, 1992, p.47, translated).



Table 4.2: Overview of ‘modern’ participation-oriented educational theories and methods

Rogerian student-centred learning	The main paradigm of this approach is that ‘nobody has ever really taught anything to anybody else and that the only learning that veritably influences anyone is that which he does himself, by his own initiative. (...) Only the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the pupils could facilitate this initiative and that the teacher should, through his attitude, value the pupil, listen to him, allow him to understand himself, but without avoiding being himself’ (Meirieu, 1992, p.52, translated). Therefore, it is a pedagogical current valuing very much a non-directive teaching (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986, 1994), i.e. ‘they propose to define the teacher as a ‘facilitator’ who listens to what is being lived in the group, is attentive to providing the help that will allow him to understand himself, is disposed to not dispensing knowledge unless the pupils themselves press him to do it. (...) The teacher would naturally plunge into the common experience providing the knowledge that responded to a manifested expectancy. Each of the pupils, stimulated in such a manner, would then get to work, by searching the elements that could be useful for him in order to better understand what he was living’ (Meirieu, 1992, p.51, translated).
Differentiated Pedagogy	Although the expression was first coined by Legrand in 1973, the concept had been present, in one way or the other, in all the above mentioned schools of thought (Meirieu, 1992). The basic idea is that ‘it is the pupil that learns and no-one else can learn for him... And because there are no two identical pupils there can be no effective learning unless through differentiated pedagogy. (...) It is a philosophy of the ‘pupil as a subject’; a pedagogy of autonomy conceived as the ability of progressively piloting one’s learning by oneself; a conception of social relations as being, simultaneously, a recognition of the diversity and a search for solidarity (...)’ (Meirieu, 1992, p.178, translated).
Cooperative learning	‘Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that consists in making pupils work together in a group context; the groups must be formed with care so that a positive interdependence between the pupils is created’ (Abrami <i>et al.</i> , 1996, p.1, translated). This approach is presented then, as developing positive interpersonal skills (Kagan, 1992). Several points distinguish it from traditional teaching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- it is interdependent rather than competitive;</li><li>- the pupils’ objectives are linked in a positive way;</li><li>- the importance and the quality of interactions between the pupils are fundamental;</li><li>- the academic and social goals are often established in collaboration with the pupils;</li><li>- the teachers will always keep a certain amount of direct teaching, but their role, is seen more as that of observer, facilitator (Abrami <i>et al.</i>, 1996) and consultant (Kagan, 1992).</li></ul>
Project Pedagogy	‘Projects are long-term, problem-focused and meaningful activities that bring together ideas and principles from a number of subject areas or disciplines’ (Goodrich, Hatch, Wiatrowski & Unger, 1995, p.viii). They also ‘encompass activities that have a useful, serious goal, which can transform the child’s life framework (in and out of school). From the moment this practice is installed, learning tasks such as reading, writing and counting come up as real’ (Wuchner, Payen, & Huber, 1982, p.37, translated). Rationale for the use of projects (Goodrich <i>et al.</i> , 1995): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Projects motivate students to learn about and use a wide variety of literacy and thinking skills;</li><li>- Projects encourage students to become self-directed thinkers and learners;</li><li>- Projects give teachers opportunities to use innovative teaching techniques, such as coaching;</li><li>- Projects can be used both in classrooms and in programs outside of school.</li></ul>
Freirean Pedagogy - Paulo Freire (1921-1997)	In Freire’s ‘view, education is a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. He seeks to transform education from a dominating, dehumanizing process [of the oppressed] (...) to a humanistic and liberating one in which the educator invites the learner to discover reality critically’ (Hart <i>et al.</i> , 1997, pp.46-47). He is, therefore, a militant educator who believes that ‘in education, one always has to begin with a concrete context in order to respond to that context’ (Gadotti, 2002, translated). His method is based on the dialogue and on a new conception of the pedagogical relation, by which the respect for the students and for their individual knowledge becomes the fundamental aspect (Gadotti, 2002). Also, he believes ‘in the pupil’s capacity to organise his own learning’ as well as in that the ‘responsibility for his own education rests with the student, who possesses growing and self-assessment capacities’ (Gadotti, 2002, translated).

As it can be appreciated in these tables (4.1 and 4.2), ‘participation-oriented’ education has been conceived in multiple ways throughout the last hundred years. Many of the ideas and expressions they include could also be found in previous chapters, when the



characteristics of current ideas on participation were discussed. However, whether more ‘classic’ theories are considered or ‘whether we think, closer to us, about the successive ‘fashionable’ formulations, which irritate some and seduce others, from ‘non-directiveness’ to ‘project pedagogy’, to ‘tutoring’, to ‘differentiated pedagogy’” (Hameline *et al.*, 1995, p.6, translated), some aspects are common to them all:

**a) They all present themselves as bringing something ‘new’ in terms of pedagogical thinking:** It is not at all innocent that those methods chose names such as ‘new education’ or ‘modern school’. For the most part, they manifested the intention to break away from the moulds of the so-called ‘traditional education’ which is portrayed as ‘archaic’. Many see their ideas ‘as a militant act of *rupture* with the past, and with a past that was so close to them that, to stigmatise it, they talk about the ‘contemporary school’, as it still was at the time, as being ‘medieval’ (...)’ (Hameline *et al.*, 1995, p.17, translated).

**b) The child is seen as being at the centre of the teaching and learning process:** In fact, one of the most propagated notions was that: ‘It shall no longer be the pupil that turns around the programme, but the programme that will be centred on the pupil’ (Hameline *et al.*, 1995, p.18, translated). Therefore, the teacher’s role is no longer to be at the centre of the classroom’s activities, but rather that of a moderator, of someone who supports the children in their learning (Harwood, 1998; Ingram & Worrall, 1993).

**c) The child is to be active and participate in his/ her learning:** For many ‘the passivity of the pupil is seen as a calamity. There is not one pedagogue who does not embark on the song of denouncing the risks of ‘verbalism’ or ‘parrotting’, the dangers of an apparent docility of the pupils, which masks the absence of interest. The teachers



are encouraged to render their classes lively, certainly through their own effort, but also with the pleasure of fomenting participation' (Hameline *et al.*, 1995, p.20-21, translated).

**d) None has ever become mainstream:** While many of these methods and theories have significantly contributed to educational thinking 'there is no nation where the practice of participation in schools has been broadly adopted' (Hart, 1992, p.43). It becomes, therefore, clear that it was not a statutory view on participation that was at the origin of these approaches.

Moreover – and more recently – not only have participatory practices been identified in contexts where there was a low statutory influence, but they have even developed in contexts in which the statutory element was *adverse* to the idea of participation and democracy. Such is the case of the New Schools (Escuelas Nuevas) in Colombia, which have been many a time pointed out as models of participation-oriented schools and that have developed under a dictatorship regime (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Schiefelbein, 1990). This is an approach where a participation-oriented philosophy and a democratic school management (Hart & Schwab, 1997) are used in schools in poor rural areas with reportedly very positive results in terms of lack of absenteeism, academic progress and students' self-esteem (Schiefelbein, 1990).

#### **4.4.2. The development of participation in statutorily 'poor' contexts**

It is believed that the two latter cases provide support to the argument that one must go beyond a statutory approach as it is not enough to hold a legalistic view on the issue of children's participation in school (Hammad, 1999) in order to achieve exercised

participation. Yet, these views – rhetorical and statutory – have constituted the main approach developed until now, not only in the efforts for the application of participation rights but also in research and literature (Morrow, 1999). And this has been the case even if, apparently, this type of view does not go to the essence of granted and exercised participation rights’ mechanisms because it does not, by itself, explain the development of such mechanisms.

As mentioned before, this does not necessarily mean that statutory measures do not have a role to play in participation processes, but that that role has been over-evaluated in the current literature, while other fundamental aspects have been somewhat neglected. In fact, it would be interesting to research contexts with high levels of statutory measures which do not translate into high levels of granted and exercised participation, in order to investigate the reasons why that happens: Fields and Narr (1992) mention that, many times, the lack of will of those involved is invoked as an explanation of why statutory measures or rhetoric principles have not been put into practice. They suggest, however, that that is a somewhat simplistic approach for, in their view, ‘the problem of human rights as ideology and not practice is not merely hypocrisy. If that were the case, the matter would be uninteresting from a theoretical point of view’ (Fields & Narr, 1992).

Shipman (1985, p.273) volunteers, on his turn, that this lack of effective translation might happen because ‘in the education service, administrators, inspectors, advisors and teachers interpret, amend, supplement and excise the policies. This is why (...) intervention projects turn out to be different on the ground from their blueprints [or legal dispositions]’. Other explanations might be also plausible and this aspect could certainly be the object of future research interest. However, research in contexts that



suffer a great level of influence of statutory measures but where that is not translated into high levels of exercised participation is generally performed with the goal of finding out the reasons for that failure and trying to remedy it (Datnow, 2002).

Then, it is believed that the most interesting situation is that presented above, where high levels of granted and exercised participation can be found in contexts with low levels of statutory influence. This is for three main reasons:

- 1- There is an affirmation that participation exists but its definition and origins are not clear;
- 2- There is a positive approach because one is not dealing with a situation of failure, i.e. why a programme or law that was supposed to have worked, did not, as is the case of contexts with high level of statutory influence and low levels of granted and exercised participation.
- 3- If one understands the mechanisms for the emergence and maintenance of high levels of granted and exercised participation, in a situation where they are not framed by a legal framework, the potential and hope for intervention even in adverse contexts is much higher.

That said, the difficulty remains to identify participation in those contexts because, unlike what happens in statutory saturated environments, there are few pre-determined boundaries or templates with which to establish comparisons. If those boundaries can be considered as somewhat constraining of participation rights – as seen in previous chapters – they do nonetheless provide an indication of what is expected in terms of children's participation. These boundaries are non-existent in contexts that are poor in statutory measures. Therefore, there is, first of all, a need to clearly identify and operationalise the elements that allow for the definition of participation in the school context (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996).

#### 4.5. The need for indicators of exercised participation in the school

Further to the above-mentioned aspects, it can be argued that ‘new studies are needed which would analyze, quantitatively and qualitatively, the *actual* participation of European children and adolescents in their families and schools. (...) These studies must analyze how, how much, and in what areas children and adolescents participate in families and schools, in different countries and regions. Accordingly, it would be interesting to obtain data on *actual* children’s participation and compare these data with the perception that parents, teachers, students and children have of that participation’ (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997, p.294, emphasis added). These claims, supporting the need for research on children’s *actual* participation, have given credit to the idea of the development of *indicators* of granted and exercised participation in the school (Casas, 1997; Saks, 1996).

In this case, indicators are seen as the ways by which the concept of exercised participation in school ‘can be expressed in practical terms’ (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996, p.277): they consist in the identification of structures, elements, attitudes or behaviours which represent the translation into practice of the concept of participation. The underlying rationale is that to understand why and how participation develops in these contexts, one must necessarily be able to identify it beforehand (Finn, Folger & Cox, 1991).

Besides these arguments, it should be mentioned that many claims for research on indicators have also come from those concerned that a view of statutory rights as established, for instance, by the Convention on the Rights of the Child is not enough to ensure those rights’ translation into reality within children’s lives (Ennew & Miljeteig,



1996). As these authors suggest – and as it could also be appreciated in chapter 3 – ‘the first review of reports from States Parties on their measures to implement the Convention *confirmed the need for appropriate indicators*. In this review, it became clear both to the Committee and to independent observers that some *tools to measure or assess the implementation are desperately needed* in order to proceed beyond a theoretical discussion’ (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996, p.218, emphasis added). Indeed, they recognise that ‘just as the ratification of an international Convention does not guarantee its implementation, the fact that national laws and policies have been adopted is not sufficient proof that the rights enshrined in a Convention are enjoyed by the people of that country’ (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996, p.213).

Therefore, as indicators are seen also as useful tools for implementing and monitoring children’s rights (Casas, 1997; Smith, 1998), a discourse has emerged which supported the need to establish indicators for the 41 ‘executable’ articles of the Convention. This type of discourse has led to preliminary research on *general* children’s rights indicators (e.g. Casas, 1997; Cohen, Hart & Kosloske, 1992; Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996; Scherer & Hart, 1999). Presently, however, even if ‘some efforts have been made to identify the degrees of participation, (...) there is not a set of indicators which can measure the implementation of children’s right to participate within family and school’ (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997, p.292).

If the need for a set of indicators is judged as pertinent, the discussion is, then, open as to the properties that such a set of indicators – regarding in this case, participation in school – should possess. As a first requirement it is argued that ‘such indicators must be easy to collect and easy to understand in order to serve their purpose. (...) [Moreover, they must be] based on reliable statistical or other relevant information’ (Ennew &

Miljeteig, 1996, p.213). It has been suggested, for instance, that a good statistical indicator of participation in education would be the number and percentage of students' unions or pupils' associations in a given country (Badran, 1996 cited in Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997).

Attention has been drawn, however, to the importance of such indicators being not only statistical, but that they include also qualitative information (Pomplun, 1997). This caveat is necessary because there is a 'tendency in some fields for any statistical method to be confused with indicator work, as well as for indicators to become ersatz programme goals, and an all-too-frequent assumption that only Northern experts in quantitative methods can develop complex, expensive systems of indicators (often little more than lists of variables) that are then imposed on Southern cultural contexts' (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996, p.220). This affirmation supports not only the argument that there should be multiple sources and types of indicators but also that these should be adapted to the context where they are used. In fact, as Casas (1997, p.294) argues 'it is not desirable at this point to seek a universal set of indicators but rather, a process and a framework that can be used to develop indicators for children's rights that are culturally and nationally appropriate'. This is the view followed in this thesis.

In an effort to identify that 'process and framework', a brief synopsis of 'indications' of granted and exercised participation in the school context is presented. They are designated as 'indications' for the moment, because none of the authors below claims that he/ she is establishing 'indicators'. In order to organise the information and owing to the impossibility of addressing all aspects of the educational process, the emphasis will be put on three aspects deemed relevant in the field of child participation. These include: decision-making (Covell & Howe, 1999), teaching and learning tasks (Morton,



1996; Schwab, 1989) and assessment (Gersch, 1987; Holden, 1998; Osler & Starkey, 1998). These aspects were intertwined with the three micro-levels being considered: the school as a whole, the classroom and the individual process of any given child. The results of this synopsis are herein presented (table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Indications of granted and exercised participation in the school context

	Decision-making	Teaching and learning tasks	Assessment
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of school policy (Gersch &amp; Noble, 1991; Osler &amp; Starkey, 1998)</li> <li>- School management (Alderson, 1999; Osler &amp; Starkey, 1998)</li> <li>- School councils (DfES, 2001; Holden, 1998; Nias, 1999; Osler, 1998)</li> <li>- Voting processes and elections (Alderson, 1999; Howard &amp; Gill, 2000)</li> <li>- Rule establishment and application of discipline (Croce <i>et al.</i>, 1996; Gersch, 1987; Hester et al., 2003)</li> <li>- Hiring staff (Croce <i>et al.</i>, 1996)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School councils and assemblies (showing/ telling) (Nias, 1999)</li> <li>- Planning and carrying out activities in the school (Pridmore, 2000).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disciplinary assessment (Croce <i>et al.</i>, 1996)</li> <li>- Assessment of school activities (Nias, 1999)</li> </ul>
Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Circle time/ class assembly (Alderson, 1999; Lown, 2002)</li> <li>- Voting processes and elections (Alderson, 1999; Howard &amp; Gill, 2000)</li> <li>- Class charters and declarations (Osler &amp; Starkey, 1998; Starkey, 1992)</li> <li>- Choice of subjects within curriculum (Hammersley, 1984; Wood, 1998)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of learning materials (Holden &amp; Clough, 1998)</li> <li>- Active management of classroom (Holden, 1996; Tanner, 1998)</li> <li>- Posing and answering questions (Hammersley, 1984; Badran, 1996, cited in Ochaíta &amp; Espinosa, 1997)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disciplinary assessment (Croce <i>et al.</i>, 1996)</li> <li>- Assessment of global class work in circle time (Alderson, 1999; Lown, 2002)</li> </ul>
Individual Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Choice of subjects within curriculum (Hammersley, 1984; Wood, 1998)</li> <li>- Individual Education Programmes (DfES, 2001; Halliwell &amp; Williams, 1992; Van Reusen &amp; Bos, 1994)</li> <li>- Choice of school and expelling processes (Hodgkin &amp; Newell, 1999)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of learning materials (Holden &amp; Clough, 1998)</li> <li>- Posing and answering questions (Hammersley, 1984; Badran, 1996, cited in Ochaíta &amp; Espinosa, 1997)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SEN assessment (DfES, 2001; Trainor, 2002; Van Reusen &amp; Bos, 1994)</li> <li>- Assessment of own work (Gersch, 1992; Gersch <i>et al.</i>, 1993; Hodgkin &amp; Newell, 1999)</li> </ul>

As can be appreciated in table 4.3, although the literature provides several ‘indications’ of granted and exercised participation in the school, no systematic approach has yet been used to develop a framework of indicators covering the three above-mentioned aspects of the educational process in a comprehensive manner (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997). That exercise is one of the goals of this thesis.

Furthermore, it should be noted that an essential aspect so that these elements can be considered as effective indicators is not only that they are *present* in the school context

being examined, but that their *functioning* is also participation-oriented (Lown, 2002). This caveat implies, for instance, that the fact that there *is* a pupils' council in a school, can only be considered as an indicator of participation if its *functioning* follows participatory and democratic principles. It is believed that any potential set of indicators would have to be sensitive to these aspects, otherwise, the latter may become examples of the apparent or illusory participation discussed above (Alderson, 1999; Wood, 1998).

An example of an element that might easily fall into that trap is that of schools' educational programmes and curricula, which have often been considered as good indicators of participation-oriented policy and practice (Brown & Harrison, 1998; Hargreaves, 1999; Regis, 1996). In fact, a clarification is in order: it is believed that a curriculum can only be considered as a good indicator insofar as it explicitly promotes participation as a value (Naval et al., 2002). If that is not the case, it is, necessarily, because other values are judged as more important (Vibert, Portelli, Shields & LaRocque, 2002).

This is mainly because a curriculum can never be deemed as value free (Lindsay, 2003): in fact, '(...) ignorance is never neutral. A curriculum which, by its prescriptions, causes learners not to know something, or not to realise that something they do know can be understood differently, has the effect of actively promoting a certain viewpoint or set of values' (Ashley, 1998, p.175). Consequently, the fact that participation is not promoted cannot be seen as a matter of 'innocent omission'. In fact, there are situations in which the presence of other values is so strong, that no place is left for participation: it has been suggested that 'the policy emphasis on teachers teaching within an increasingly directive framework could eventually become demotivating and counter-productive' (Pollard & Filer, 1999, p.159). In the UK, for instance, it has been argued



that ‘the pressures of meeting the National Curriculum allow little room for child-oriented initiatives or issues of concern to children which are not part of the prescribed work programme’ (Lansdown & Newell, 1994 cited in Morrow, 1999, p.160). In such cases, it is defensible that the curriculum is not only not participation-oriented, but that it becomes even a hindering element to the prosecution of participation rights in the school (Print & Coleman, 2002).

It is, therefore, legitimate to question what elements a curriculum should include to be considered as participation-oriented. Holden and Clough (1998, p.14) propose that, according to the above-discussed framework, ‘education for participation becomes education for values-based participation, and involves children:

1. Developing an understanding of

- the significance of individual and collective action
- their own values and the relationship of these to behaviour and action
- democratic systems and the individual’s role within these
- contemporary events and controversial issues
- the causes of social and environmental problems
- recent historical events and their relationship to the present/ future.

2. Being encouraged to

- explore issues of justice, rights and responsibilities within the taught curriculum
- voice their own needs and concerns within a responsive framework
- develop the skills of critical reflection through discussion
- address the implications of their own behaviour with respect to social and environmental problems
- participate in decision making and action at school, community or global level.’

Apart from its definition, a whole different issue is, then, what leads to this type of curriculum – or, for that matter, any of the aspects presented in table 4.3 – being actually implemented in any specific school. This is fundamental because identifying participation indicators will only be a first and intermediary stage of the exercise proposed for this thesis. As Ennew and Miljeteig (1996, p.221) argue: ‘indicators are simply tools to aid understanding and not the answer to all questions’. In fact, knowing what participation can look like in school is not equivalent to understanding the *factors* that lead to its development and maintenance. It is, therefore, believed that there is a need to not only identify indicators of participation in school, but also to assess the factors that influence those indicators, i.e. to understand why and how granted and exercised participation mechanisms develop and work.

#### **4.6. Factors influencing the exercise of participation rights in the school**

These factors are defined as the elements whose presence, absence and/ or degree of influence will determine the level of exercised participation in a given context. Beyond the above-mentioned reasons, a fundamental motive for studying these factors relates to the possibilities they offer in terms of intervention. In fact, it is defensible that knowing what elements influence granted and exercised participation, will allow for the planning of interventions addressing them specifically. This could then lead to increased levels of granted and exercised participation in all types of contexts.

A number of factors supposed to influence granted and exercised participation in the primary school is presented in the literature. Evidently, if a legalistic line of thought is followed, statutory measures would necessarily be considered as a major factor of influence in the development of such mechanisms. It was argued, however, that, owing



to their various limitations, there is a need to go beyond statutory measures as explanatory factors for the development of granted and exercised participation. Therefore, the current section will focus on three groups of factors, which were devised according to the elements that are presented in the literature as being influential:

4.6.1. one element dealing with perceptions and attitudes;

4.6.2. one dealing with materials and structures;

4.6.3. one dealing with knowledge and skills.

#### **4.6.1. Factors related to perceptions and attitudes**

These are the elements that, perhaps, relate most closely with a view of participation as a granted right (Flekkøy, 1992; Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). As discussed above, when addressing the issue of ‘pseudo-competence’ for participation, conceptions of children and childhood (Mayall, 2000; Stalford, 2000; Verhellen, 1993) as well as attitudes towards, for instance, young children and those designated as having SEN (Hart *et al.*, 1997) are believed to greatly determine the degree of participation granted to them. As Pridmore (2000, p.112) proposes, ‘among the main barriers to children’s participation are the attitudes of adults, attitudes reflecting the traditional concepts of personhood, knowledge and authority characteristic of strictly hierarchical societies in which wisdom and the ability to make decisions have to be learned over a lifetime rather than being the inherent possession or capacity on an individual’.

This is true also in the school context. As an example, the author quotes recent research conducted in Nepalese schools on the implementation of the UN Child-to-Child approach regarding health education (further information on this approach can be

obtained at [www.child-to-child.org](http://www.child-to-child.org)). From that work, it is concluded that ‘the level of child participation which had been achieved depended upon (i) the degree of the teacher’s belief in the capacity of children to participate and to take effective, self-directed action; (ii) the extent of children’s self-esteem and communication skills; and (iii) the degree of support for children’s pro-active role from parents and community’ (Pridmore, 2000, p.108). In this case, two of the aspects influencing the level of exercised participation attained were adult-related attitudinal elements.

Other authors assert that not only are adults’ attitudes determinant factors, but also that children’s own perceptions are very influential in what concerns their exercised participation (Hart & Zeidner, 1993; Ippoliti, 1998). They support this view building on research on children’s perceptions of their rights (John, 1998; Limber *et al.*, 1999) and also specifically of their participation rights (Hogan, 1998; Howard & Gill, 2000; Lown, 2002).

#### **4.6.2. Factors related to materials and structures**

The pedagogical materials used in schools are other elements which, depending on their nature, are presented as either favouring or raising difficulties to exercised participation (Wade & Everett, 1994). Pridmore (2000, p.111) promotes this view by arguing that ‘there is an urgent need to develop improved classroom materials which most teachers can use and which will allow levels of child participation in and out of the classroom that will prove acceptable to most teachers’.

The other aspect in this section has to do with the presence or absence of participation-oriented and democratically run school structures (DfES, 2001; Naval *et al.*, 2002;



Osler, 1998). In fact, it is said that ‘schools can undertake a review of their own power structures and consider how these hinder or support participation. Existing structures may need to be modified to accommodate those who are currently excluded from the development process’ (Pridmore, 2000, p.111). Some of these structures, such as school councils and class assemblies, have already been mentioned in the course of this review. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that their influence on child participation is necessarily dependent on the way they function and are managed. This caveat is given credit by a recent study involving more than 2000 British students aged 7-17, which indicated that ‘relating to all participation and democratic rights, [although] 52% of pupils said that they had a school council, (...) less than 20% think their council is effective in helping to make school a better place’ (Alderson, 1999, pp.193-194).

#### **4.6.3. Factors related to knowledge and skills**

Knowledge of their own rights and, consequently, of their participation rights is another factor supposed to influence children’s participation (Hogan, 1996; Howard & Gill, 2000; Osler, 1998). As Osler and Starkey (1998, p.316) point out, ‘a right is not a right unless you know about it’. Therefore, knowledge of participation rights is believed to be an aspect that ‘must be reflected in the management style of the classroom’ (Holden, 1996, p.103). As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the main goal should be the *exercise* of participation rights and not just the *knowledge* of these rights (Print & Coleman, 2003).

Another factor deemed essential to attain that goal is, therefore, the development of so-called ‘participation-skills’ (Deardoff, 1996; Tanner, 1998). The dominant rationale is that it is also not enough to hold the knowledge or possess participation-oriented

structures to ensure effective exercised participation. As ‘one child on the newly set up school council comments ‘You cannot just dump a load of kids into a big room and expect them to form an effective school council’’ (Holden & Clough, 1998, p.19). In fact, ‘if children are to be educated to participate, they will require a range of skills, including social skills and skills of communication and judgement and of course the opportunity to practise and develop these skills’ (Osler and Starkey, 1996, cited in Holden & Clough, 1998, p.16). Holden and Clough (1998, p.18) argue that, without such skills ‘the pupil is in danger of engaging in participation at a superficial level, with little understanding of the issues’. The authors insist, nevertheless, in that not only the children but also the teachers, would have to possess these ‘key skills’ so that higher levels of granted and exercised participation would be attained. This is seen, then, as a dialectic movement through which, on the one hand, participation favours the development of such skills (Pridmore, 2000; Wood, 1998) and, on the other, is dependent on them in order to be effective (Osler, 1998; Tanner, 1998). These school-related ‘participation skills’ – to mention but a few – include:

Table 4.4: School-related ‘participation skills’

The development of:

- Problem-solving (Wood, 1998)
- Arguing (Holden & Clough, 1998)
- Interviewing (Wood, 1998)
- Accountability (Alderson, 1999)
- Empathy (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997)
- Negotiation (Alderson, 1999; Van Reusen & Bos, 1994)
- Mediation (Holdes, 1998)
- Collaborative research (Deardoff, 1996; Wood, 1998)
- Self-advocacy (Van Reusen & Bos, 1994)
- Case-presenting and conflict-solving (Wood, 1998)

} SKILLS

And being able to:

- Express opinions and know when to give in and when to persist (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997) and relate one's opinions and actions to a values framework (Holden & Clough, 1998)
- Be a confident speaker and a sensitive listener (Tanner, 1998; Wood, 1998)
- Reflect critically (Holden & Clough, 1998) and have a conscious awareness and control of one's thinking and learning (Wood, 1998)
- Make decisions with due consideration of others (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997)
- Monitor and reflect on actions and events (Wood, 1998)
- Taking responsibility for others (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997)



These are three types of factors presented in the literature as influencing participation mechanisms in the school. However, this presentation was necessarily brief because, as was the case with participation indicators, it is believed that the systematic study of such influence has yet to be conducted. This study intends, therefore, to proceed to an in depth analysis of these issues.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

This chapter started by addressing the rationale for considering the micro-levels, in general, and the school, in particular, as a good locus for the development of granted and exercised participation. Having established the pertinence of these micro-levels it seemed important to justify the need to go beyond rhetorical and legalistic views of participation and concentrate research efforts both in defining and explaining the exercise of participation by children. The main arguments provided to support that view were, on the one hand, that participation appears to develop even in contexts where the influence of statutory measures is low or even inexistent; and on the other hand, that the presence of statutory measures does not seem to guarantee that high levels of exercised participation will be in place. Several examples supporting both these arguments were presented.

This was followed by a section which justified the need to investigate both the micro-contexts – such as the school – and the exercised view of participation in order to define and operationalise that participation. The suggested means to achieve this was the development of a framework of indicators. Finally, there was a section addressing the need to explain the factors that can influence those indicators and hence have a better

understanding of the development of participation in school and how to intervene in that contexts in order to achieve higher levels of exercised participation.

This process has led, then, to the elaboration of two main research questions which emerged and found their justification in the course of this literature review:

Question 1: How can the exercised right to participation be defined in the primary school?

Question 2: What are the factors that influence such participation?

In order to address these questions, an empirical research study was designed. The description of that study and of the results obtained will constitute the object of the following chapters.



## Chapter 5

### Methodology

#### 5.1. Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is two-fold: it is intended to present a description of the steps taken during the research process; and it aims also at justifying the methodological approaches and procedures that were used. To that effect, the justification of the approaches that have been chosen will be interwoven with the actual description of the procedures. It reflects, as well, the process through which a research design was developed in order to explore the research questions presented in chapter 4, i.e.:

Question 1: How can the ‘exercised right to participation’ in the primary school be defined?

Question 2: What are the factors that influence such participation?

For the reasons mentioned in chapter 4, it was considered that school contexts with a low level of influence of statutory measures would provide the optimal conditions for exploring these questions. It was, therefore, necessary to consider what type of research design would best fit their demands. Although other possibilities might have been valid, it was judged that conducting a *case study* in a primary school would be an appropriate strategy to attain those goals (Yin, 1993). The reasons for this decision will be explained ahead.

Along with describing the epistemological position taken, the methodology of the study and the specific methods used, this chapter will also address the application of the latter in the field. Particular attention will be awarded to two aspects: the specific moments of

the process that encompassed interesting implications – namely with regards to ethical considerations – and the description of new instruments that have been created for the purpose of this study. Finally, there will be an assessment of the research procedures as well as a description of the instrument created to analyse the data; i.e. the set of indicators.

## **5.2. Rationale for the use of a case study approach**

The main purpose of this study was to go *beyond Conventions*, i.e. to reach a comprehension of the practice, of the participants' views, and of the meaning of exercised participation. Therefore, it was considered that an approach that would provide an in-depth appreciation (Stenhouse, 1985; 1993) of the practice of participation would be that of a case study, having a school as the unit of analysis (Bassegy, 1999; Yin, 1994). This decision is supported by the fact that a case study approach is considered as highly appropriate to 'study and portray the impact in a school of a particular innovation' (Walker, 1993, 1994, p.165) as well as to reveal 'how theoretical abstractions relate to common sense perceptions of everyday life' (Walker, 1993, 1994, p.167). If the concept of 'participation' cannot be considered as a complete innovation in itself, its translation into the educational world, from a 'theoretical abstraction' to the practice, might certainly be viewed as such. Furthermore, a case study approach supposes the examination of an instance in action (Walker, 1993, 1994), where the particular and concrete – but not the unique – are understood in relation to the general phenomenon (Cohen, *et al.*, 2000) and may contribute to the comprehension of the latter (Golby, 1994; Rachel, 1996; Toren, 1996).



Having taken this decision, plans were made for the immersion for a full academic year in a primary school and for the use of an ethnographic approach (Lutz, 1993, 1994). The option for a study covering a whole academic year finds support and ‘is justified in terms of the need to determine areas of significance and to check the reliability and consistency of data’ (Walker, 1993, 1994, p.163).

An ethnographic approach was also deemed appropriate as it presupposes that social reality is complex (Hammersley, 1999) – as is the phenomenon of child participation – and that research is also a social endeavour (Walker, 1993, 1994). There is a stress on studying the phenomena in their natural environment and in trying to minimise the impact of the researcher upon the context that is being studied (Hammersley, 1996; Pollard, 1996). These appeared to be appropriate characteristics for the development of a study in the field of child participation. Having established the general research approach, it was necessary to select a specific case – i.e. a school – in which to conduct the study.

### **5.3. Description of the case**

As it often happens in educational research, pragmatic contingencies have played a major role in this process (Burgess, 1985b): in this instance, the researcher was personally acquainted with a psychologist working in a local structure of the Ministry of Education in southern Portugal. The preliminary proposal for this study was then presented to this psychologist, with whom the project had been previously discussed. This acquaintance was also a great asset both in facilitating access and in helping select a school that would constitute an appropriate case for the study intended. Several

criteria presided to the selection of the case. For the purposes defined above, it was necessary that the school selected:

- a) was part of a system with a low level of influence from statutory measures;
  - b) was fairly large so that a critical mass of children and teachers could be involved in the study, and different types of personal experiences could be represented;
  - c) that its head-teacher and teachers would, in principle, be open to co-operation
- (Pollard, 1996).

This psychologist volunteered demographic charts of the schools in the region which, combined with her personal knowledge of the schools, allowed to elaborate a list of those that fitted the pre-established criteria, in order of their relevance. The first school in that list was Santa Maria School and, therefore, the researcher and the psychologist contacted its head-teacher, Alice – in October 1999 – in order to ask for co-operation. (The names used for the school and all the participants are fictitious).

The process of securing access to the school will now be described in more detail as it is believed to have held some interesting elements that are worth analysing further. The focus of the discussion that follows it will be put on the researcher's perceived status and the implications this is believed to have had in the rest of the fieldwork.

### **5.3.1. Securing access**

In the first meeting with the head-teacher, the general lines of the study were approached. Alice referred that this was her first year – and, in fact, her first month – as a head, and also that she had always been interested in educational research, having undertaken some research projects herself. Alice was, hence, willing to collaborate in



the study. This accepting attitude from the head was, in effect, constant throughout the study and it is believed this played a part in ‘legitimizing the study with the rest of the school community’ (Pollard, 1996, p.292). Alice mentioned, nevertheless, that she believed some of the teachers might be somewhat reluctant to co-operate, fearing the disruption this might cause to their classrooms. This belief was – unfortunately – confirmed when the head proposed the study to the rest of the staff.

Although she did not bring that up at the time, Alice mentioned, later on, that another reason – and perhaps the main one – offered by some of the teachers for being reluctant, was that they believed that someone doing a doctorate was probably ‘very pompous and judgmental’ and would come into the school to ‘criticise them and boss them around’. The head suggested that this was probably due to the fact they had had previous negative experiences with researchers in other projects.

Owing to the head’s insistence, however, the teachers agreed to have a meeting with the researcher before making their final decision. The unedited field-notes of that meeting are believed to provide an interesting account of the securing access episode, which will be afterwards analysed. As the text is in its integral form, it was judged as appropriate to maintain the first person narrative in which it had been written.

‘14th October 1999,

I arrived at the school at 10.10 and went to the head’s office, where she was waiting for me. After the initial greetings, she showed me to a minuscule meeting room [which was the staff-room], furnished with a table that took up most of the space, and lots of chairs. The space was already quite cramped and there was nobody there yet.

Meanwhile, the head went around the classrooms to get the teachers.

People started arriving; taking their coffees; sitting around the table: ‘good morning’, ‘good morning’, etc. The head comes back to the room and talks about some issues

concerning a letter the school had received. The teachers kept talking and laughing amongst them. Then, she points at me (I was seating right next to her) saying: 'This is the person I told you about and that wants to come in and do a study in our school'. I introduced myself and started presenting the project. While I was talking, I handed out the copies of the project I had prepared but, at first, nobody picked them up, so most of them were left on the table.

At this point, I got really nervous and was already thinking that I would have to contact the next school on the list because this one wouldn't probably work... Anyway, I went on to talk about what the project would involve; I addressed the issues of anonymity and confidentiality; I also talked in terms of the disturbance this might cause to the classrooms, as the head had told me that this was an issue of concern.

While I was talking, I got more and more nervous, started sweating, and they weren't helping much: there were eighteen women and two men looking at me with totally 'closed' faces: no little smiles, no nodding to indicate that they understood what I was talking about... nothing. I finished what I had to say and again... nothing.

People were looking at each other as though no one wanted to speak first. I try a faint smile around the room. A teacher, [Arthur] a man in his early thirties, asks something like: 'Do we all have to participate, or can you just go into some classes?' I answered that I would like to have the co-operation of all the teachers but, if that wasn't possible, as long as they wouldn't oppose the study in general, nor my presence in the school, that I could still work with those people who were willing to do so. So, he says: 'Then, I believe that we all have to reach the same decision'... Nobody answers; people are still looking at each other. And the same man: 'I, personally, wouldn't have a problem with it'. I thank him. Still nothing from the others...

At this moment, an older lady seating in front of me, [Laura, who was actually the vice-head], looks me in the eye and says: 'well, to be honest, I came here today with the intention of saying 'no'. And the reason for that was because this will imply having another person in the school and I think that is disturbing, [etc, etc.]. But I think that your project is interesting and also... I have a niece who's about your age [24] and she's doing something similar to you... and when I see you asking for our help, I know how difficult it is, and I just can't say no'... And she went on: 'I warn



you, I'm a very traditional teacher and you'll probably see 'atrocious' things in my class but you're still welcome'.

I thanked that teacher saying also that I was quite touched by what she had said. In fact, I was also quite relieved as I saw this as a 'turning point' in the meeting. Then, another of the older teachers [Julia] said: 'Yes, I felt the same way. I was going to say no, but I see how important this must be for you... I only have boys, but if I had a daughter who was doing what you are, I'd like people to help her. So you can come into my classroom too'. And, to my left, another lady [Raquel]: 'That's it. For me it was kind of the same: I was looking at you and thinking of my daughter and that I would like people to help her with her work'.

By this point, the atmosphere was totally different and people were smiling and even slightly laughing at what each of them was saying about what had contributed to their decision.

And, again, the man from the beginning [Arthur]: 'For me, it's not for my children – because one is 2 and the other is 6 months old – it's for my own sake. It's because when I was doing my post-graduation, and I wasn't working here yet, I came to this school and people answered all my questionnaires and helped me, so I wouldn't have the morals to say no'.

And then, one after the other, they all started saying yes, that they would collaborate and I thanked them. Profusely, of course...

And, the head-teacher: 'See, didn't I tell you it would be better to come talk to them in person?'...

In the end, they all said yes and I was extremely relieved. The head continues: 'So, if everybody agrees, I'm going to add this research project to our Educational Project, which anyone can consult, and it will be part of our school activities for this year'.

It was also agreed that the teachers would inform the parents in their first parent-teacher meeting that this project was taking place, describing it generally; and telling parents that they were free to consult it in the school's Educational Project or call me or the head if they had any concerns; and also referring that from the point where any activities were undertaken with children, other than whole class observation, a more formal authorisation would be sought.

Before the end of the meeting, there were still two small episodes worth noting. One was an invitation from the head: She explained that the following day there would be no classes as it was a training day, but that the teachers were all having lunch together and asked me if I'd like to join them. The other was the second male teacher [Daniel] asking me whether I'd like to join them in a lottery pool they had every year. My answer to both of them was yes, of course. And it felt like I was starting to get 'in'.

### **5.3.2. Analysis of relevant aspects regarding the process of securing access**

Following this episode, it was difficult to interpret fully both what had occurred and the different stages the meeting had gone through. Reflecting upon it, however, and notwithstanding its interest as a narrative, it is believed this 'securing access' episode holds some relevant elements which deserve a closer look. These refer particularly to how access negotiation is not a pure rational process, exempt of personal bias, and how personal characteristics – age, past experiences, different teachers' status within the school – can strongly influence this type of negotiation process (David, 2002).

#### **5.3.2.1. Teachers' initial reluctance**

It was difficult to understand the teachers' initial reluctance without being in full possession of information relating to the participants' previous experiences (Woods, 1984). It was felt that there was an animosity, in the beginning of the meeting, which was perceived as being disproportionate to the reasons that the teachers had provided for being concerned about the researcher's presence in the school. It is believed that what Adelman (1985, p.43) designates as an unfortunate but 'well-founded suspicion of the educational researcher' from the practitioners may have played a role in the



situation, in the sense that the teachers were perceiving this researcher through the lenses of their negative past experiences.

Both Adelman (1985) and Walker (1993, 1994) recommend, then, that the researcher always be overt and frank as to her / his purposes, methods and procedures in order to avoid deception, especially when negotiating access. However, in the present case, just being overt and frank when explaining the study did not appear to be the determinant factor for success in negotiating access. This leads on to the second and third points of this analysis.

#### **5.3.2.2. The ‘turning point’ in the meeting**

At a certain moment in the narrative, a ‘turning point’ in the meeting is described. This refers to the point in which it is believed that teachers started to shift from a negative to a positive opinion. Pollard (1996), Adelman (1985) and Walker (1993, 1994) can perhaps help understand what happened at that moment, as they propose an analysis of the events in the light of the relationships, interactions and social networks that were in place amongst the participants. The preferred interpretation is that this situation involved not only the teachers’ perceptions about the researcher but particularly and, above all, the status that each participant possessed in the school. If not, an examination of certain details should clarify these issues and support that interpretation:

It was apparent, from the beginning, that the researcher was receiving the head’s support for conducting the study, which was manifested by the head’s offer to present the research proposal to the teachers and by her arranging for a meeting before the other teachers totally excluded the possibility of the study being done at Santa Maria.

However, that seemed not to constitute a powerful enough argument in convincing the other teachers. At another moment, teacher Arthur's response could also have prompted the other teachers into a positive answer. Yet, that was not the case: It was only when teacher Laura, spoke and shifted to a positive opinion, that the other teachers followed in that direction too.

Having gathered more information on this issue, it is believed that a possible explanation as to why this occurred can be volunteered: in fact, Laura was the vice-head of the school as well as the person with the longest in-service time at Santa Maria (23 years) and was highly regarded by the other teachers. Alice, the head (two years in the school and one month as head) or Arthur (in his second year at the school) were not perceived as having the same ascendancy over the rest of the staff. The fact that this particular person assented to the project is believed to have been the event that legitimised both the researcher and the study in the eyes of the rest of the teachers. In that sense, it would be appropriate to argue that Laura was the key gatekeeper of this process (Pollard, 1996).

#### **5.3.2.3. Teachers' perception of the researcher**

In spite of Laura's intervention serving as a prompt that the teachers followed, the actual reasons for being 'let in' are also worth analysing: Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.11) make a case for the importance of considering the 'biographically situated researcher', which is potentially helpful in analysing this situation. Adding to this notion, the importance of considering the 'biographically situated participants' would also have to be highlighted (Sikes, 1999), as it is believed that an interaction of these two notions motivated the occurrences: indeed, it should be noted that 16 out of the 19



teachers were over 40 and most of them had children in their twenties; a fact that they actually referred to as having contributed to their decision. Therefore, it is believed that, due to this generation gap, their first perception of the researcher was somewhat that of a 'daughter-like figure'. This implied that they could identify and empathise with the researcher's situation, if not because of their own experiences – as in Arthur's case – at least by proxy.

This identification and empathy appear to have eliminated the perception of the researcher as a threatening element; a type of perception which is referred as highly detrimental to the teachers' acceptance of researchers (Adelman, 1985; Davies, 1985). In fact, the teachers' initial conception – which was certainly tainted by their previous experience – of what a person doing doctoral research would look like or how she or he would relate to them (in terms of criticising or 'bossing them around') appeared to be overturned. This interpretation was all the more reinforced by Alice mentioning, the day after the meeting, that the teachers had discussed what had happened amongst them and some commented that she should have told them before that the researcher was a 'young lady', as they would have been less reluctant.

#### **5.3.2.4. Signs of acceptance and researcher's status**

Apart from the initial acceptance, there were a number of signs, even that same day, of being 'allowed in': these were believed to be reflected in both invitations for joining the lottery pool and for lunch the following day, which were activities exclusive to the teachers up until that moment.

During the course of the school year it is plausible that the researcher's status became clearer, sometimes being defined by opposition to the other people in the school, who had a well determined role and status. Nevertheless, it is believed that the perception some of the teachers held of the researcher, as a daughter-like figure, never totally faded. This was patent in occasions where remarks similar to those received during the initial meeting emerged, such as: 'I really miss my daughter today [her daughter attended University in Lisbon]. I bet your mom misses you a lot too, when you're in England' (teacher Raquel, February 2000).

However, as Rachel (1996, p.124) argues, gaining access 'is not just a matter of walking through the door': being 'let in' the school is just a first step but the 'getting in' process takes much longer and is more complex than it is possible to describe here. Indeed, Walker (1993, 1994, p.183) reminds that 'the mutual trust required in research relationships takes time to create' and therefore a 'progressive access' was sought and negotiated according to the developing needs of the project.

### **5.3.3. Description of context**

Having referred to the process of securing access, it was deemed important to describe also the general and specific context in which this study took place (Tierney, 2002). This section will start by a brief account of the institutional structures at the National and Regional levels (including the legislation relating to participation in school and its implementation) and will be followed by five other sections which focus on the description of: the school and its functioning, the school population, the staff and the classrooms that participated more closely in the study. Within those sections, the data regarding the city were obtained from the Portuguese National Institute of Statistics web



site (at <http://www.ine.pt>), whereas the information concerning the school was either volunteered by the head or collected in the school's educational plan. Within the current section, the data were obtained from different sources related with the Portuguese Ministry of Education, which are individually cited whenever appropriate. At this point, the intention is mainly to provide information on the structure and functioning of the Portuguese Educational System at the National and Regional levels so that these aspects, as well as their impact on the functioning of the specific school being studied, can be later on discussed in chapter 9.

In Portugal, the so-called 'Basic and Compulsory Education' covers nine years which are divided into three different 'cycles'. The 1<sup>st</sup> of these cycles includes the first four years of a child's school education (starting in the year of their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday), and is commonly designated as the 'primary level' of education. In the academic year in which this study took place (1999/ 2000) there were, in the whole of Portugal, 499351 children attending the '1<sup>st</sup> cycle', who were supported by 31758 teachers (with an average of 15.7 children per teacher) within 16657 schools (with an average of 29.9 children and 1.9 teachers per school) (Ministério da Educação, 2001).

At the National level, the structure that covers the cycle in question (as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles of the 'Basic and Compulsory Education') is the Department of Basic Education, which reports directly to the Minister and Secretary of State of Education (Ministério da Educação, 2001). This is the government department responsible for the creation of the National Curriculum of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, which all primary schools have to implement (Departamento de Educação Básica, 1998). The current National Curriculum dates back to 1991 and includes the following areas: Expressive arts (Physical and Motor; Musical; Dramatic; and Plastic Arts); Environmental and Social Studies;

Portuguese; Mathematics; and Personal and Social Development (which is non-confessional) or Religious and Moral Education (of Catholic confession) (Departamento de Educação Básica, 1998).

In the context of this study, and notwithstanding these academic contents, perhaps the more interesting aspects of the Curriculum to mention are those that have a direct relation with the issue of participation. These are mainly expressed in the section of the Curriculum that describes the goals of Basic Education. In fact, it is mentioned that: one of the ‘great general goals’ of the basic education system is to: ‘develop values, attitudes and practices that contribute to the formation of citizens who are conscious and participative in a democratic society’ (Departamento de Educação Básica, 1998, p. 17, translated). Another pertinent section sets goals for the so-called ‘citizenship dimension’ of the curriculum, which highlights the need for basic education to:

- Stimulate the creation of positive relational attitudes and habits which favour socio-affective and civic maturity, both within the family and with respect to the conscious and responsible intervention within the surrounding reality.
- Promote the development of autonomous and group work attitudes and habits which favour: the prosecution of individual or collective initiatives of civic or social interest; the analysis and the participation in discussion of topics of general interest (...).
- Grant the adequate information for the understanding of the meaning and the implications of our relationship with other socio-cultural and economic contexts and the development of an attitude of responsibility, solidarity and participation.

(Departamento de Educação Básica, 1998, pp. 19-20, translated).

A clear participation-oriented line of thought can be noticed also in the description of what is expected from teachers with regards to the implementation of the curriculum:



‘These principles require the teacher (...) to respect the individual differences and the learning pace of each pupil; to value pupils’ previous academic and non-academic experiences; *to consider the pupil’s individual interests and needs; to stimulate the interaction and the exchanges of experience and knowledge; to allow to the pupils the choice of activities; to promote individual initiatives and the participation in the school’s responsibilities*; to value the pupils’ acquisitions and productions; and, finally, to create an environment which is favourable to socialisation and moral development’ (Departamento de Educação Básica, 1998, p. 30, translated, emphasis added).

How these principles translate into the reality of the school that was studied is a matter that will be discussed in chapter 9. In order to help both schools and teachers, not only with the implementation of the curriculum but also with technical and pedagogical support, the Ministry of Education has five different Regional Directors of Education (Ministério da Educação, 2001). Because each of these Regional Directors still covers a vast geographic and population area, they have also developed more ‘local’ structures, the Educational Area Centres, to which they delegate some of their responsibilities. These Centres have, among others, the stated function of ‘integrating the different functional areas of the Education (...) and co-ordinating, accompanying and supporting the organisation and functioning of the schools’ (Ministério da Educação, 1986). They also cover the human resources management (e.g. staff hiring) of their region, the material resources and the technical and pedagogical support to schools.

In the present case, this latter aspect is perhaps the most relevant, as the technical and pedagogical team of the Educational Area Centre to which Santa Maria School belonged was composed only of two psychologists, one social worker and one teacher specialised in SEN, which had to support 31 schools and 2382 pupils (270 of which were designated as having SEN). It is believed that this ratio had a significant impact on

the relationship between the Regional and the Local (school) level. This aspect is briefly approached in the following sections and will be discussed further in chapter 9.

#### **5.3.3.1. The school**

This school is located in an interior city of 58000 inhabitants situated in southern Portugal. As a result of the importance of the city's historic centre, tourism plays a great part in the local economy. There are 31 primary schools in the city, most of which are in the outskirts or in adjoining – more modern – neighbourhoods. In fact, Santa Maria is the only one located in this historic centre, which, according to the head, makes it a very coveted school because it is close to many of the parents' workplace. It is also mentioned in the School's Educational Plan that the main reason provided by the parents at the time of enrolment for wanting their children to attend Santa Maria is indeed the school's proximity to their workplace. And this is because most of Santa Maria's student population does not live in the city centre.

Financially, Santa Maria is supported by the local municipal authority who fully covers the expenses regarding the school's refectory and provides the school with £150 per term (3-month period), which is spent on cleaning materials. According to the head, no financial support is received from the Ministry of Education itself, and therefore, in order to buy the necessary pedagogical material and equipment, the teachers have devised two schemes:

- a) asking the parents and guardians for a contribution ranging between approximately £1.66 and £3.33 per child at the beginning of the year;
- b) making sandwiches to sell to the children for their mid-day break, at the cost of about £0.25.



Although this source of financing may seem unorthodox, the head mentioned that, over the years, it has assured the school's cash-flow and turnover. To give some examples, it has paid for the decoration of the refectory, a photocopy machine, two televisions, a VCR, fans for each class – as temperatures can rise up to 40°C in the summer – and all the disposable materials used in the school (paper, ink, chalk, etc.). Furniture and computers have mostly been 'inherited', either from the local University or from government institutions.

This financing system, which was judged as unsatisfactory by the head, was, however, on the verge of changing: owing to the reform of the primary school management system, the following year (2000-2001) Santa Maria was to be included in a grouping of three schools (two primary and one secondary), sharing a common educational plan and managing the funding autonomously. The funding would then be provided directly by the Ministry of Education. (For further information on the reform of the primary schools management system, see Lemos & Silveira, 1998).

In the year this study took place (1999-2000), however, Santa Maria was still pedagogically framed by the local structure of the Ministry of Education (Educational Area Centre), and namely by its technical and pedagogical support team (see above) with whom the head met at the beginning and at the end of the school year, and to whom the school presented its educational plan for approval. The fact that they could only meet twice a year was, once again, deemed unsatisfactory by the head, especially due the fact that this school had the highest level of children designated as having SEN in the city (43 children, which represented 15.58% of the school's population).

### 5.3.3.2. School functioning

As mentioned above, Portuguese primary school programme covers four years and is called the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of basic education (Ministério da Educação, 2001). In Santa Maria, there were three classes per year, sharing eight classrooms, over three different timetables. Three classes occupied their classroom the whole day, i.e. from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. – within the so-called ‘normal shift’ – and the other classes shared the remaining five classrooms by occupying them either in the ‘morning shift’ (from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.) or in the ‘afternoon shift’ (from 1.15 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.).

Apart from the twelve classes described above (three classes over four years), there was an extra class in Santa Maria: the so-called ‘thirteenth class’ was composed of children who, by having failed one or more years, had lost their original groups. This happened because, in Portugal, when a child fails a year, he / she does not change class to join a younger group but is maintained in his / her own class, albeit following a different curriculum. The rationale for this practice, according to the Ministry of Education (Lemos & Silveira, 1998), rests in that it would be damaging for the child to lose his / her social network and personal links. However, when a child’s original group reaches the end of year 4 and moves on to secondary school, that child has not yet finished his / her primary education and needs to remain in primary school at least for another year. In Santa Maria, the decision was taken to place all these children in the so-called ‘thirteenth class’, which became a multi-level class, with children following the curriculum of years 2, 3 and 4. As will be seen ahead (chapter 6), although this practice had been installed in the school for a number of years, it was nevertheless, perceived negatively by some of the teachers, on the basis that it promoted the social exclusion of those children and concentrated in the hands of one single teacher a lot of ‘problematic’



pupils. In fact, the ‘thirteenth class’ was many times referred to as ‘the class nobody wanted’ and was usually allocated to the young or new-coming teachers.

**5.3.3.3. The school population**

A brief portrait of the school population is presented in this section. Unless otherwise stated, the information in this section was obtained from the school’s education plan.

The school has 276 students over the four years of primary school. 52.2% are girls and 47.8% are boys. The distribution of pupils through the four years is as follows:

Table 5.1: Distribution of pupils through the four years

Year	Value	Percentage
1	60	21.7%
2	67	24.3%
3	65	23.6%
4	84	30.4%

The higher percentage of pupils in year 4 (table 5.1) is justified by the so-called ‘thirteenth class’.

Portuguese children normally start school in the year of their 6th birthday. Therefore, the children’s age varied between 6 and 13 and its distribution is as follows:

Table 5.2: Pupils’ age distribution

Age in years	Value	Percentage
6	23	8.3%
7	58	21%
8	75	27.3%
9	66	23.9%
10	43	15.6%
>10	11	3.9%

The following information derives from the 205 questionnaires that were returned by parents and guardians. The parents' and guardians' age ranged between 20 and 64 and its distribution is as follows:

Table 5.3: Parents' and guardians' age distribution

Age group	Value	Percentage
< 25	6	3%
26 – 30	24	11.8%
31 – 35	49	29%
36 – 40	73	36%
41 – 45	30	14.8%
> 45	10	5.4%

In order to maintain a cultural integrity, the parents' and guardians' professions were coded according to the Portuguese National Classification of Professions (Portuguese Ministry of Labour, 1994). Their distribution is as follows:

Table 5.4: Parents' and guardians' professional distribution

Professions	Value	Percentage
Professionals	19	9.4%
University and secondary teachers	14	6.8%
Primary teachers	18	8.7%
Technicians	19	9.3%
Clerks	38	18.6%
Commerce salespersons	17	8.3%
Qualified workers	26	12.6%
Non-qualified workers	33	16.1%
Students / unemployed / retired	21	10.2%

#### 5.3.3.4. The staff

Santa Maria has 20 teachers aged between 34 and 57 (average = 45.7). There are 18 women and two men. Their training varies from a three-year teacher-training degree (16 teachers) to a maximum of five years training (four teachers had completed a 2 year



post-graduate training). Fifteen were born, raised and received their teacher-training in the local city and five were from other regions. Their work experience ranged from 3 to 35 years with an average of 22.65 years.

There were 13 class teachers, six support teachers and the head, who also assumed part-time support teaching. It must be mentioned that the support teachers did not possess any specific training in SEN. They had only followed the three-year regular training but were placed in this school with the function of working more individually with children designated as having SEN.

The school served also as a teacher-training centre for seven students from the local university. There were three members of the kitchen staff and four 'auxiliaries of the educational action', commonly designated as 'employees', who performed the functions of cleaning the school as well as doing the surveillance of the recreation periods.

#### **5.3.3.5. The classes**

Although in the beginning of the school year all the classes were involved in the study, when systematic observation was necessary (see section 5.7.3.2.), it was realised that this type of observation would be impossible to accomplish in all classes, especially in the context of a single-researcher project. Therefore, eight classes were selected taking into account the following criteria:

- that all years were represented equitably (to account for age-related factors, see chapters 6 and 7);
- that there was an equivalent number of children designated as having SEN as well as a similar situation regarding the support teacher's presence, between classes in the

same year (to account for factors related with ‘personal characteristics’, see chapters 6 and 7);

The following table (table 5.5) provides a description of the eight classes that were judged to match the above-mentioned criteria and that were, consequently, more closely involved in this study. In fact, all the data analysed in chapters 6 and 7 proceed from these classes. Similarly, the data presented in chapter 8, with regards to individual children, pertain to 32 pupils of these classes (four children per class). The information presented in table 5.5 was gathered in the school’s educational plan. The definitions of different SEN are a direct and unedited translation of the expressions used in the educational plan to describe children designated as having SEN.

Table 5.5: Description of the eight classes that participated in the study

Class teacher	Nina	Ruth	Filipa	Arthur	Eunice	Lucia	Laura	Clara
Year	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4
Shift	Afternoon	Afternoon	Morning	Normal	Afternoon	Morning	Normal	Morning
Number of students	16	20	23	23	20	22	22	24
Number of students designated as having SEN	2	2	4	4	1	1	4	4
Type of SEN indicated	1 severe intellectual problem and severe behavioural problem, 1 learning difficulties	1 microcephaly with severe behavioural problems, 1 learning difficulties	1 mental deficiency, 1 global development delay, 2 learning difficulties	1 hearing impaired, 3 learning difficulties	macrocephaly with motor deficiency	learning difficulties	learning difficulties	learning difficulties
Presence of support teacher	Full-time	Full-time	Half-time	Third-time	Half-time	Third-time	Third-time	Third-time
Age of class teacher	52	50	41	34	47	49	50	45
Years of experience	29	28	19	12	27	31	31	23
Years of teacher-training	3	5	3	5	3	3	3	3



#### **5.4. The use of mixed methods and a triangulated approach**

Having briefly described the case under study, it seems important to address the particularities of the research design. With regards to this issue, a distinction proposed by Harding (1987, cited in Henwood, 1996, p.31, emphasis added) appears to be particularly valuable. This author 'argued that, although the term 'method' tends to be used as a catch-all phrase, one should distinguish one's *epistemological position* (assumptions about the basis of knowledge) from one's *research methodology* (a theoretical analysis defining a research problem and how research should proceed) and in turn from any *specific method* (that is, the strategy or technique that is actually adopted)'. This distinction will, therefore, be used to address the several aspects of the research process.

#### **5.5. Epistemological position**

As it happens in many disciplines, the field of educational research is not exempt from heated discussion with regards to which paradigm – quantitative or qualitative – would better serve its purposes (Woolgar, 1996). However, the establishment of an opposing dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative paradigms has often been criticised as being too simplistic, too polarised and not holding enough discriminatory power (Golby, 1994). It has also been claimed that, in practice, the methods often intermingle in the same piece of educational research, which would imply that there are no 'pure' qualitative or quantitative studies and that a 'paradigm bound' approach would be only but a fiction (Hammersley, 1996).

Therefore, the position taken in this thesis is that proposed by several authors (Burgess, 1985a; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley, 1993, 1994a; 1993, 1994b) to the effect that the choice of methods should have as primary criterion their adequacy to the specific research purposes and the problems under study. The notion of ‘methodological eclecticism’, which bears ‘the *combination* of quantitative and qualitative methods (...) on the ground that this promises to cancel out the respective weaknesses of each method’ will be borrowed from Hammersley (1996, pp.167-168).

## 5.6. Research methodology

It should be noted that, in the current section, only a general discussion on this issue will be presented. As the research evolved, new elements shaped it and defined it more finely. Therefore, other presentations addressing the research methodology will be held along this chapter, where appropriate.

Discussing the research methodology involves analysing the modalities that the above-mentioned ‘methodological eclecticism’ can assume in the practice of the research process. According to Hammersley (1996, pp.167-168, emphasis added) this can take at least three forms:

*‘Triangulation:* Here, the findings obtained from quantitative and qualitative techniques are used to check each other on the basis that they are likely to involve different sorts of threat to validity (...).

*Facilitation:* Here, one approach acts as a source of hypotheses, or as the basis for the development of research strategies, in the other. For example, qualitative interviewing can be used as a preliminary to survey research, both to generate hypotheses and to develop questionnaire items that are intelligible to the intended audience (...).



*Complementarity*: Here the two approaches provide different sorts of information that complement one another. Qualitative research is sometimes regarded as being better able to produce information about interactional processes and about participants' perspectives, whereas quantitative research is presumed to be better at documenting frequencies and causal patterns'.

Although 'complementarity' and 'facilitation' will be addressed and used, it was 'triangulation' that provided the best input into the possibilities of examining this context as it 'reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2), by assuming that 'no one point of view is final, [and] all have their contribution' (Golby, 1994, p.23).

Triangulation can also take several forms with regards to: the observers or researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994); the types of data collected (Kefyalew, 1996; Pollard, 1996); the methods or techniques used (Golby, 1994); the informants (Walker, 1993, 1994); etc. Even if in this study the main strategy was the triangulation of data gathering techniques, 'multiple triangulation' also took place (Pollard, 1996). This was conducted in the hope of adding rigour, breadth and depth to the investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), which stem from a concern with the quality of the research process. The issue of quality will be further addressed in the section that focuses on the assessment of the research procedures (section 5.9.). For the moment, the current section will concentrate in discussing the type of balance that can be established in the integration of the methodology. Galton and Delamont (1985, p.172) propose three ways of achieving this goal, which will be taken in consideration. It is believed that the approach taken in this study would best resemble number 3:

‘1 – The sets of data could be treated equally.

2 – The qualitative data could be treated as more valid and the quantitative used to reinforce important and/or controversial points in the argument.

3 – The quantitative data could be regarded as ‘the facts’ and the qualitative used to ‘flesh them out’, illustrate them, or ‘humanize’ them’.

The final point made by Harding (1987, cited in Henwood, 1996), i.e. the actual strategies and techniques for collecting data, constitutes the object of the next section.

## **5.7. The specific methods**

Although other techniques might have been adequate, the use of the following three methods was considered as appropriate for examining this particular context. This constitutes a summary of reasons, as they will be further described when each specific method is addressed:

*Document Analysis:* was used because all the levels are bound to produce written evidence, although these may be of different nature. It should not be forgotten that these have to be analysed while maintaining a critical eye in terms of the source, the purpose and the intent that presided to their production (Duffy, 1987, 1999).

*Surveying:* was used as it is the method that allows to get ‘closer to the actor’s perspective’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.5) and let their voices be expressed (Pollard, 1996).

*Observation:* was used in order to complement both the former, because ‘interviews (...) provide important data, but they reveal only how people perceive what happens, not what actually happens. Direct observation may be more reliable than what people say in many instances. It can be particularly useful to discover whether people do what they say they do, or behave in the way they claim to behave’ (Bell, 1987, 1999, p.156).

The other reason for using observation stems directly from research questions, i.e. in



order to appreciate how abstract concepts are translated in practice, it is indispensable to observe that practice.

In fact, it was deemed that none of these individual methods would be sufficiently encompassing to attain the objectives of this research, hence the need to combine them within a triangulated approach (Tierney, 2002). Nonetheless, a realistic view as to the possibilities of developing a fully triangulated approach throughout the micro-levels – the school, the classroom and the individual level – had to be considered. The use of each of these particular methods is described in the following sections.

#### **5.7.1. Document analysis**

Although multiple documents have been collected, this section will focus on the two sources of documentary evidence that contributed most closely to the data analysis. These included a) the school's educational plan and b) the minutes of the school council's meetings.

a) the school's educational plan is a document that includes the curriculum followed in the school (which is based on the Ministry of Education's national curriculum) and a description of the school's educational philosophy and functioning, which is specific to each school but has to be presented to and approved by the local structure of the Ministry of Education (Educational Area Centre). Interestingly, it should be mentioned that although the National Curriculum includes areas such as Expressive Arts (Physical and Motor; Musical; Dramatic; and Plastic Arts) as well as Personal and Social Development (which is non-confessional) or Religious and Moral Education (of Catholic confession) (Departamento de Educação Básica, 1998), in this school's Educational Plan only the Portuguese, Mathematics and Environmental and Social

Studies subjects are included. Furthermore, it establishes 'minimum goals' which are lower than the 'general goals' for each of the subjects as established by the National Curriculum. These aspects will be discussed in chapter 9. The Educational Plan also provides demographic and contextual information on the school's staff and children, which was very useful in characterising the context (see section 5.3.3.). Furthermore, it contains all the individual educational plans (IEP) of children designated as having SEN as well as the description of the different pedagogical projects the school is involved in (including this research project).

b) the school council is a monthly meeting held in the presence of all teachers and presided by the head. It constitutes the highest management body of the school and the forum where pedagogical issues and matters pertaining to the school functioning are discussed. In each meeting, one teacher is responsible for taking the minutes of the events, which are afterwards read out, approved and signed by all the participants.

The access to these two documents was facilitated by the head. Both were content analysed in search of information that could convey both narratives of specific situations involving child participation and elements portraying explicit or implicit attitudes towards participation (Silverman, 2000).

## **5.7.2. Surveying**

### **5.7.2.1. Surveying the head**

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with Alice, the head (16/10/99 and 26/01/00). The first interview was aimed at getting familiarised with the school, its



functioning, its management and funding system. As in all the other interviews from then onwards, the interview schedule – which consisted not of formal questions, but of bullet point topics (see Appendix 4) – was shown to Alice prior to it being conducted and permission was asked to audio-tape the conversation. Confidentiality and anonymity were also assured.

In spite of numerous informal conversations throughout the year, a second interview was felt as necessary in order to better understand some of the aspects observed as well as approach new and more specific issues. In this second interview (26/01/00) the focus was on Alice's career and her experiences as a head; aspects of the school functioning and organisation stemming from a preliminary document analysis, e.g. of the school's educational plan; policy and practice concerning children with SEN; and conceptions of children's rights and responsibilities at school, namely regarding participation. The pragmatic procedures followed in this interview were analogous to those in the previous one. Both of these interviews were fully transcribed and their content analysed (Silverman, 2000), focusing mainly on elements conveying perceptions and attitudes in this domain.

#### **5.7.2.2. Surveying the teachers**

Following the first set of in-class observations (see section 5.7.3.1.), semi-structured interviews were also conducted with all the teachers and support teachers. The interview schedules (see Appendix 4) consisted of bullet-point topics, stemming from the research questions. A first section, which was common to all the teachers, focused on:

- a description of a person's career (Lortie, 1984), which was used as an introduction and for the purposes of 'ice breaking';

- their ideological beliefs with regards to education;
- their perceptions of their role as teachers and of the children's as students;
- their perceptions of the children's rights and responsibilities as well as of participation;
- their conceptions regarding different types of students and potential link between that factor and participation; (the support teachers' schedule did not include this section, as it was less relevant in the type of work they were developing, but was more detailed in the section concerning policy and practice with regards to children designated as having SEN).
- and also policy and practice concerning children designated as having SEN.

Furthermore, the schedules also included a second section addressing particular points for each teacher which were directly related with aspects or situations that had been observed in their classrooms. This was an effort of triangulation, so that observation and surveying could complement each other (Perry et al., 2002). It has been argued that in order to understand people's observed behaviour, 'one strategy would be to ask participants for their accounts' of the situations observed (Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, 1994, p.30; Hammersley, 1993, 1994b); however, 'there is a great deal of evidence to show that what teachers do in classrooms cannot be ascertained through extrapolations from teachers' accounts of their intentions or from their accounts of what they do' (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994, p.21; Tal & Yinon, 2002). Therefore, it was believed that the association and subsequent comparison of the two types of information would help establish a clearer picture of the processes (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, 1995). These interviews followed the same pragmatic procedures described above and lasted from 35min. to 1h50min. with an average of 1h10min. They were audio-taped and notes were taken afterwards. The interviews of the eight teachers that participated more closely in the study were fully transcribed and their content analysed (Silverman,



2000) in a similar way to that of the head's interviews, being part of the data presented and discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

### **5.7.2.3. Surveying the parents and guardians**

Being important members of the educational community, the opinions of parents and guardians (designated generally as 'parents' ahead) could not be neglected (Borland *et al.*, 1998; Jackson & Sullivan, 1993). The choice to survey the parents through a questionnaire was mainly influenced by the fact that this technique would enable larger numbers of parents to be reached: considering that this was somewhat an exploratory attempt, it was deemed interesting to gather as many opinions as possible (Gambler & Palmer, 1989).

Although there were several issues that it might have been interesting to examine, the head and some of the teachers advised against sending home a very long questionnaire as they feared that the return rate would be very low. Therefore, the decision was taken to focus mainly on children's rights and responsibilities, sounding out how the parents would perceive these at home and at school.

The questionnaire started with a paragraph explaining the purposes and the aims of the research, asking parents for their co-operation and assuring anonymity and confidentiality. Then, along with some demographic questions (child's gender and age; number, age and gender of children in the family; relationship with the child of the person answering the questionnaire, their age and profession) the questionnaire consisted on a double entry table to be filled in with what the person considered to be the child's rights and responsibilities/ duties at home and at school. (A translated

version of this double entry table is presented in Appendix 4). This questionnaire was distributed to the entire school population to be taken home for completion.

In the eight classes where systematic observation and surveying involving the children were to take place, the questionnaire was accompanied by a letter asking for permission to survey the children. It was explained that this would be done through a questionnaire focusing mainly on their experiences at school (see section 5.7.2.4.1.), which the parents could consult beforehand, if they wished to (a copy of the children's questionnaire had been distributed to each of the teachers for this purpose). The letter also explained that this would lead to four children from each class being interviewed about their conception of an ideal school and their own thoughts on children's rights and responsibilities as well as their experiences of participation. Again, confidentiality and anonymity were assured for both the children and the parents. It was also asked that the parents inform the class teacher if they saw any inconvenience in their child's participation. The teachers mentioned later on that some parents asked to see the questionnaire beforehand, but that none of them opposed their child's involvement.

205 questionnaires were returned, which represents a 75.9% response rate. Of these 205 questionnaires, 19 had to be eliminated, mainly because of incomplete answers. The total number of valid questionnaires was 186. These were content analysed; a system of units and categories was created and all the questionnaires were coded (Silverman, 2000). The categorising system can be consulted in Appendix 4. Twenty, randomly picked, questionnaires have been independently categorised by a second researcher, revealing a 87.3% inter-coding reliability, which was judged as appropriate.



#### **5.7.2.4. Surveying the children**

##### **5.7.2.4.1. Questionnaires and ‘participation scale’**

In what concerns the children, the aim was to assess perceptions of their own participation, as well as different aspects of their schooling experiences. It was considered that an appropriate approach to address these issues – which entailed the possibility of both relating and comparing those aspects – would be through the application of Self-Perception Profiles (Harter, 1985; Harter & Pike, 1984).

In its version for children and pre-adolescents (Harter, 1985), these profiles comprise two scales: the self-perception profile and the importance scale. These are divided in five sub-scales including ‘scholastic competence’, ‘social acceptance’, ‘athletic competence’, ‘physical appearance’ and ‘behavioural conduct’. A sixth sub-scale addressing ‘global self-worth’ is also included.

In its pictorial version, which is dedicated to younger children (Harter & Pike, 1984), there are four sub-scales addressing ‘cognitive competence’, ‘physical competence’, ‘peer acceptance’ and ‘maternal acceptance’. The Portuguese versions of both these profiles (Alves Martins *et al.*, 1995) were used.

However, as the main interest was children’s perceptions of their participation and this aspect is not reflected in the Harter’s profiles, the decision was taken to conceive a new scale – henceforth designated as the ‘participation scale’ – to be added to the profile. This scale followed the same type of statement form and answering scheme as the existing Harter’s profiles – i.e. by which the respondents have to indicate their degree of

identification with one or the other type of children described – and its items were alternated with the existing ones. As it happened with the already existing items, this scale's items were organised starting with the positive statement either on the right or on the left side in order to avoid mechanical responses.

The statements were derived both from the literature and from observation and they described behaviours believed to portray child participation in the school context. As it would be impossible to address all aspects of the participation process, two statements focused on participation in decision-making, two on teaching and learning tasks and two on assessment. They read as follows (translated version):

#### DECISION-MAKING:

- ☐ Some children usually give their opinion in class when a decision is taken BUT other children don't usually give their opinion in class when a decision is taken.
- ☐ Some children don't usually choose the work they do in class BUT other children usually choose the work they do in class.

#### TEACHING AND LEARNING TASKS:

- ☐ Some children usually present their work to the class BUT other children don't usually present their work to the class.
- ☐ Some children don't usually pose questions to the teacher BUT other children usually pose questions to the teacher.

#### ASSESSMENT:

- ☐ Some children usually discuss with the teacher the marks they believe to deserve BUT other children don't usually discuss with the teacher the marks they believe to deserve.
- ☐ Some children aren't usually called out to answer the teacher's questions or go to the blackboard BUT other children are usually called out to answer the teacher's questions or go to the blackboard.



As the pre-adolescent version is prepared to be applied collectively (Harter, 1985), this new ‘participation scale’ was piloted in a year 3 class – that was not one of the eight under research – in order to check if all the items were well understood by the children. As a result of this consultation, one of the statements was slightly altered in its language. In what concerns the Pictorial Scale, because it has to be applied individually (Harter & Pike, 1984), it was piloted with five year 1 children. This time, there seemed to be no problems concerning the language used. The reason for piloting the scales in years 1 and 3 derived from the assumption that, if the *younger* children to whom each scale was addressed could understand them, they would not represent a problem for the *older* children in those groups, i.e. years 2 and 4.

One alteration, however, was made to the ‘pictorial scale’: instead of just *adding* the ‘participation scale’ to it, it was decided to use it in *replacement* for the ‘maternal acceptance’ scale. The reasons for this replacement were manifold, but the one that contributed the most to this decision was a matter of sensitivity and respect for some of the children’s personal situations: in fact, within the four classes in which this profile was to be applied, there was a total of six children who lived either in foster homes or in institutional placement, to whom it was not judged to be ethically correct to ask questions about ‘maternal acceptance’. Furthermore, considering that this scale had to be applied individually, an *addition* rather than a *replacement* would have made the application process much longer. Also, the ‘maternal acceptance scale’ was deemed to be the one that had less direct relevance with regards to the topic of the study.

Following the advice of the head – in the sense of trying to counter-effect the teachers’ previous negative experiences – a copy of each questionnaire was distributed beforehand to the teachers of the classes where it was going to be applied. The

children's profile was then applied collectively, in the four classrooms of years 3 and 4 to 85 children, whereas the pictorial scale was applied individually, to the 80 children of years 1 and 2. Again, when applying the profiles, the children were reminded, either collectively or individually, that their opinion was being sought on a certain number of issues but they were free to participate in the activity or not (David, 2002; Kefyalew, 1996). In this particular instance, none of the children withdrew from participating. These data were subsequently entered into a database, treated and analysed. The 'participation scale' revealed a 0.80 Cronbach's alpha, which was deemed appropriate.

#### **5.7.2.4.2. Children's interviews**

Despite the interest of the data collected through the above mentioned questionnaires – which allowed for a comprehensive portrait of the children's perceptions (Burden, 1998) and to obtain the general opinion of *all* the children – it was deemed important to approach other issues in greater depth, namely those resulting from the observation (see section 5.7.3.). It was therefore considered that semi-structured interviews, conducted with groups of four children from each of the eight classes, would be an appropriate means to attain those objectives (Lewis, 1992; Perry et al., 2002). It was decided to proceed to these interviews closer to the end of the school year – in June – to allow for the children who were in year 1 to have had a full year's experience of schooling and, therefore, to be able to express their opinions about it.

There was also an interest in having represented in those groups, children that had a different understanding and diverse perceptions of their own participation. In order to obtain these groups, the 'participation scale' results of each class were organised in a crescent order, and divided into quartiles, forming four groups of children who had



shown similar results within that class. The intention was that one child from each quartile would take part in the final group to be interviewed, thus attempting to ensure that different opinions were represented. Keeping in line with the ideological background of this study (Warren, 2000), once all the classes had been divided into quartiles, it was arranged with the teachers to have a session where the children would *vote* on who, from each of the four quartiles, they wanted to represent the class in the interview (Hart & Schwab, 1997).

In the beginning of this session, the activity was explained to the children and it was also mentioned that they were free to participate. On this occasion, two boys in a year 3 class indicated that they did not want to take part. Voting bulletins and a ballot box had been previously prepared for secret voting. When the votes were counted, four children from each class – one representing each type of participation perception – were group-interviewed by the researcher in the school's library. It was explained to the children that the task would consist of making a drawing about their ideal school and then describing it to the group. Permission to tape was also asked for and confidentiality was assured. The strategy of planning the interviews as a concrete activity, such as making a drawing and explaining it, served several purposes:

- being a familiar activity to children, more than a formal interview, it served as an ice-breaker;
- allowing them to express themselves through more than one means (Wood, 1998);
- the drawings worked as prompts or vignettes (Finch, 1987) for the conversation, enhancing the scope of the discussion.

However, being aware of the dangers inherent to wrongful interpretations of drawings (Jipson & Jipson, 2003), these were used simply for the above-mentioned purposes (Finch, 1987) and were not otherwise analysed.

The interview schedule (see Appendix 4) consisted of bullet point topics addressing their perceptions of an ideal school; their rights and duties; the three areas where participation was being studied and that were already present in the questionnaire: decision-making, teaching and learning tasks, and assessment; and what they had liked best during the year. The discussion took place as the children drew, hence, rendering the situation quite informal. In the end, they would explain their drawing to the group. This resulted in 47 drawings which, as mentioned above, were used to support the interviews. There were eight interviews, involving 32 children in total, lasting from 35 min to 1h30min, with an average of 1h10min. All were fully transcribed and content analysed with special attention being paid to aspects pertaining to participation (Silverman, 2000).

### **5.7.3. Observation**

#### **5.7.3.1. Informal and naturalistic observation**

If being immersed in the school life implies being in permanent naturalistic observation and proceeding to copious note-taking (Burgess, 1985b), there are several potentially interesting contexts deserving a more rigorous observation (Hammersley, 1993). It was negotiated with the head that the researcher could attend and observe the School Council meetings. This was extremely useful in understanding Santa Maria's functioning and was also instrumental in understanding people's positions regarding



numerous subjects (namely that of provisions for children designated as having SEN, see chapter 6).

This observation took place throughout the school year, and field-notes were taken, which were afterwards compared with the official meetings' minutes. In fact, this constitutes a particularly apposite example of how triangulation of sources – in this case between the documents and the observation notes – can be useful: as these minutes were written with a certain purpose (Duffy, 1987, 1999), many times, they did not include all the discussions that had actually taken place and had to be complemented by the observation notes (see chapter 6).

Furthermore, any non-academic events that took place in the school (parties, plays, sports' days, 'Mardi Gras' parade) were also observed in order to assess how children participated in those types of events. Notes were taken either *in situ* or afterwards if this was not appropriate.

The most substantial observations, however, were those that took place in the classrooms. At first, these were of an unstructured nature, as the main purposes were getting to know the school, the different teachers and the children and trying to access their shared meanings (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994). This type of observation would also be a part of the process of generating hypotheses (Angrosino, *et al.*, 2000; Bell, 1987, 1999). These observation sessions were organised with continuous note taking every 5 minutes and 1-minute intervals. They amounted to approximately 100 hours for the totality of the classes and comprised 5 to 10 hours per class – mainly depending on teacher availability – with an average of 7h30min.

### **5.7.3.2. Systematic observation**

Although it is unarguably useful in providing a general portrait of the context and generating hypotheses, it was realised that unstructured observation was insufficient for attaining the purpose of the investigation. Its limitations concerned especially the managing of the data produced as well as the time consumed (Bell, 1987, 1999). The prevailing goals were to explore the hypotheses (see chapter 6) that had been generated and, for these purposes, systematic observation was the recommended technique (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994). This would not be an easy process, especially if concerns with rigour were taken into consideration: criticisms to this technique, which were found to be valid, had to be overcome so that an appropriate instrument could be created.

### **5.7.3.3. Criticisms pointed out to systematic observation**

Some of the criticisms will now be examined as will be the measures that were judged necessary in order to try to overcome them when building an observation schedule and a categorising system.

#### **5.7.3.3.1. The use of pre-defined categories**

Most systematic observation schedules have been known to have at their basis a list of pre-defined categories describing certain behaviours. The role of the observer is, then, to identify those behaviours, either by their frequency or by their occurrence, and note them down on his or her schedule. This type of procedure has, however, been the target of heavy criticism namely in what concerns the use of pre-defined categories (Furlong & Edwards, 1993, 1994). These have been mainly pointed at the issue of category



systems being supposedly based on the researchers' 'ideological assumptions about teaching [and learning]' (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994, p.11) as well as on 'preconceived ideas about what is important in the classroom' (Furlong & Edwards, 1993, 1994, p.52).

They have also been accused of being tautological (Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, 1994) in the sense that if 'his theories dictate precisely what the researcher is looking for, it is not surprising that he finds it – and finds nothing else' (Furlong & Edwards, 1993, 1994, p.53, use of masculine is the responsibility of the authors). While recognising the criticism, those who follow this approach still defend its use on the basis that 'any research undertaking reflects implicit values in the sense that the researcher focuses attention on some things to the neglect of others, and it is in this sense only that most observation systems are ideologically based. But systematic observers have the distinctive merit that they make quite explicit the aspects of teaching on which they are focusing attention, and make any ideological commitment quite transparent' (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994, p.11).

Nevertheless, it is still believed that the criticisms about the imposition of pre-defined categories should not be neglected. The answer to this might be that advanced by Furlong and Edwards (1993, 1994) when they refer that the categories' origins do not generally rely upon observation. Therefore, when building the category system for this study, an attempt to overcome this should materialise in using not only categories that were inspired by the literature and already existing observation schedules (Galton, Simon & Croll, 1980, 1990; Lewis, 1994; Pollard et al., 1994; Sylva, Roy & Painter, 1980), but also those stemming from previous unstructured observations in the classrooms.

### 5.7.3.3.2. Keeping the content

With a system of pre-defined categories, in which the observer has to identify and make ‘instant judgements’ (Furlong & Edwards, 1993, 1994) about the behaviour he / she witnessed, it is true that the actual behaviour or the words spoken are not registered and it is impossible to recover them (Bell, 1987, 1999). This might not be a problem if, for instance, the researcher is interested solely in what types of behaviour are more frequent. However, even in that situation, the criticism on having to make a split-second decision about what he / she saw is still pertinent (Furlong & Edwards, 1993, 1994). Moreover, if there is a mistake in the classification of behaviours or utterances, it is impossible to correct it or even discuss it with other researchers or the participants, because the actual behaviour is no longer available. With a topic and hypotheses such as the ones being studied, in which the subtleties of the language used might hold so much information (Edwards & Furlong, 1985; Stubbs, 1993, 1994), losing them could not be afforded.

Bell’s (1987, 1999, pp.163-164) advice that it ‘may be best to make fuller notes during the course of the observation and then transfer them to a summary chart’ seemed, therefore, appropriate for the current situation. It was necessary to conceive a system by which what was actually being said and done would be noted down and *afterwards* coded and categorised (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994). This observation technique is believed to have overcome some of the limitations pointed out to systematic observation because:

- 1 – Although instant decisions had to be made in determining which behaviour to note down, between simultaneous behaviours, those decisions did not need to be immediate in what concerned the coding of those behaviours (Walker & Adelman, 1993, 1994).



2 – It would be possible to preserve the content and use it to illustrate the analysis, exemplify the categories, enrich their definitions, and discuss interpretations with other researchers and the participants.

One should, nevertheless, be conscious that ‘detail is [necessarily] lost and only a partial description is provided, but that is the case whoever the observer and however he observes’ (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994, p.12, use of masculine is the responsibility of the authors). It is clear that choices have sometimes to be made concerning what behaviour to note down and that fatigue may also play a role in the amount of information that it is possible to register, but it is believed that this type of instrument would reveal itself inestimable in attaining the goals intended.

#### **5.7.3.3.3. Other criticisms**

Other criticisms to systematic observation that would have to be overcome by the type of observation schedule created include:

- *not being adapted to all types of classrooms*, e.g. in those classrooms which are more informal, ‘in which the teaching-learning situation is defined more in terms of interpersonal communication than of transmission of information, the coded observations will miss out the very processes which define informal methods’ (Walker & Adelman, 1993, 1994, p.3). However, by basing the schedule in previous observations and by not coding the behaviour immediately – i.e. by having a more descriptive production – it could be ensured that the schedule was adapted to the type of class it was going to be used in.

- *that it tends to ignore the physical, spatial and temporal context in which the behaviour occurs* (Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, 1994; Hammersley, 1993, 1994; Walker & Adelman, 1993, 1994): an attempt was made to counterbalance this not only by including contextual information (Pollard, *et al.*, 1994), but also by previewing space for additional comments. In fact, there are situations in which the context has an enormous impact on the type of behaviour observed and this has to be taken into account in the interpretation of the results.

- *that the observation systems interpret people's behaviour freely without confirming the interpretations made, with those being observed* (Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, 1994; Hammersley, 1993, 1994b). They may, thus, be providing wrongful explanations or making inappropriate extrapolations. Triangulation and respondent validation – which will be discussed ahead (section 5.8.4.) – provide a good framework in what concerns this aspect: it was important that the study benefited from the participants' own accounts with regards both to certain episodes observed, which were not clear, and also in what concerns the reasons for acting in certain ways.

#### **5.7.3.4. Development of the observation schedule and the categorising system**

Several options were considered as to what model of observation schedule and categorising system to adopt, in order to reach the goals that had been established (Galton, Simon & Croll, 1980, 1990; Lewis, 1994; Pollard *et al.*, 1994; Sylva, *et al.*, 1980). Taking into account the above mentioned considerations and criticisms and the ways suggested to overcome them, it was deemed necessary to develop a model that would resemble that of protocols, in the sense of being 'detailed records of behaviour during a task' (Gilhooly & Green, 1996, p.43). Therefore, a schedule was conceived and



tested, which would allow both for the mapping of behaviour related with children's participation in the classroom, and for noting down language and oral interactions (Bell, 1987, 1999; Furlong & Edwards, 1993, 1994; Stubbs, 1993, 1994).

These qualitative descriptions would later be coded into categories (McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994), which would be transferred into a matrix for subsequent statistical analysis, thus allowing for a more quantitative account as well (Wright, 2002). The steps taken in order to build and validate this schedule will now be described. Firstly, a schedule was planned, which included the following elements:

- contextual information (Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, 1994; Hammersley, 1993, 1994b; Pollard et al., 1994);
- 10 one-minute cases: this was not a random number but one thought to represent a good interval to comprehend the continuity of events (Hammerley, 1993, 1994b);
- space for additional comments (Pollard, 1996; Walker & Adelman, 1993, 1994).

This schedule was tested for approximately 15 hours of observations; modifications were applied and different observation periods were tried until it was considered that the type of information that was useful to the research was being gathered. An effect of fatigue could not be ignored and, therefore, another 5 minutes break was taken to rest or complete any information. The final observation routine was as follows:

- start with a 5 minute period in order to describe the context;
- followed by a 10 minute observation and note taking period, in one minute intervals;
- and end with a subsequent 5 minutes for resting and correcting any sentences or information that had been left incomplete, as the option had been made for describing a full event if it was believed to be relevant, even if this meant losing other information

(McIntyre & Macleod, 1993, 1994). A translation of a completed observation schedule is provided in Appendix 5, as an example.

Using this routine it was possible to complete three schedules per lesson. Subsequently, a preliminary coding and category list was devised, based on the behaviour and interaction observed through the preliminary schedule, the unstructured observation and also the literature, having included elements from the systems by Galton, Simon and Croll (1980, 1990), Lewis (1994), Pollard et al. (1994) and Sylva, *et al.*, 1980. Nonetheless, it necessarily highlighted those behaviours and interactions believed to be relevant to the study of child participation.

Keeping with the multiple triangulation, in order to test and validate this observation schedule and the coding / category list, an inter-observer reliability test with a simultaneous second observer was recommended (Gilhooly & Green, 1996; Pollard, 1996). This was somewhat difficult in the context of a single-researcher project. However, when discussing this issue with the head, she volunteered to do this work. This is believed to have been a good option as Alice was someone who already knew the children and the teachers; had experience in educational research and also a twenty-year career in education, which proved to be most valuable in the interpretation of some in-class behaviour and re-definition of categories. It can also be argued that this process constituted a form of respondent validation (Pidgeon, 1996; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996) as well as an example of how the participants can have a certain ownership of the research project (Campbell, 2002; David, 2002; Walker, 1993, 1994). Therefore, a one day preparatory / training meeting was arranged with Alice, according to her availability, in which the type of observation, the noting down method and the coding system being provisionally used were clarified, discussed and revised. Definitions for



each category and unit (Turner, 1981 cited in Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996) were also provided.

Three scripts were prepared for this meeting: one that had been previously coded, which was used to elucidate and justify the categorising system; one that was completed together, discussing the placement of certain behaviours or utterances in a determined category; and a third one, which was coded independently. After discussion, there were also some modifications introduced to the categorising system, namely the elimination of one category and the addition of two new ones. In the afternoon, the simultaneous observation of a class – Laura's year 4 class – was arranged for, resulting in three transcripts of ten minutes per observer. The transcripts were compared and an average 69.3% inter-observer agreement was obtained. The other 30.7% were mainly accounted for, not so much as instances that were noted differently, but as events that the researcher had noted down and the head had not. This was considered to be somewhat normal owing to the qualitative nature of the schedule, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to the fact that the researcher was more used to doing this kind of observation and could take notes perceptibly faster.

Attention has to be drawn to the fact that this process of validation consisted of a two-fold task: one concerning the observation and the other regarding the categorising system. Therefore, copies were made of the transcripts and another afternoon session was held to categorise them. This session started, once again, by the joint coding of one transcript, to ensure that a similar understanding of the categorising system was held and to clarify some categories, which were now 24 in total. The two other transcripts were categorised independently, revealing an 86.4% inter-coding agreement, which is referred as adequate for this sort of instrument (Green & Gilhooly, 1996). The

instrument was, therefore, considered as suitable for this type of observation and the observation periods were negotiated with the eight teachers. These represented 32 hours of observation in total and 96 ten-minute transcripts that were analysed and coded with the coding system described above, which is presented in Appendix 6 (summarised, translated version).

## **5.8. Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations were at the forefront of the concerns in this study. This concern is particularly pertinent in a case study using ethnographic methodology, where the participants allowed a researcher to enter their space and, in some way, also their lives (Davies, 1985; Troman, 1999), for a whole school year. Working with children also carries enhanced responsibilities (Jipson & Jipson, 2003; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000), for instance with regards to informed consent (Lindsay, 2000; 2003). Considering that this study encompasses both a children's rights and a psycho-educational perspective, this becomes an even more present issue (Warren, 2000). It is believed, in fact, that these concerns were patent throughout the research process. This will be discussed in further detail ahead.

### **5.8.1. Researcher role**

Having addressed earlier the issue of the status attributed to the researcher by the participants, it is important to discuss as well the researcher's role, i.e. the conduct assumed by the researcher and the principles that have guided the conduction of the fieldwork, as these carry relevant ethical implications.



#### **5.8.1.1. Researcher bias: values and reflexivity**

Numerous authors have addressed the fact – and the subject has been briefly approached at several occasions throughout this chapter – that doing research in social science is not an objective endeavour (Adelman, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Golby, 1994). Indeed, it can never be presumed that there is an objectively defined reality, in the terrain being researched, waiting to be apprehended: the results of research are, to a great extent, the product of the ‘biographically situated researcher’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), which means that his or her theoretical and ideological background will influence and shape all stages of research (David, 2002).

Many authors make a case for researchers to acknowledge this fact and engage in research being aware that ‘the method is not that of ‘objectivity’ but of ‘disciplined subjectivity’’ (Adelman, 1985, p.45). This means that, while acknowledging one’s own subjectivity, one should try to maintain the research procedures as rigorous as possible (Sikes, 1999) and therefore ‘discipline’ that subjectivity.

Another view being argued goes even further than just admitting that the process of doing research is a subjective one: it recommends that researchers should actually reveal and make explicit what their background, interests and values are, this being the ethical approach for conducting and presenting research (Furlong & Edwards, 1993, 1994; May, 1997). In the present case, a reflexive analysis (Toren, 1996) would necessarily have to address the researcher’s bias of an ideological belief in children’s participation both as a value and as an important pedagogical tool. This was paired with a concern that, in many contexts, children were not playing an active role and appropriating themselves of their educational process, which would require an

intervention effort. Having established this and assuming that these concerns have shaped the research, it is plausible that the participants could have perceived this fact as well. However, for the reasons, mentioned ahead, it is not believed that this compromised the way in which the fieldwork procedures were carried out.

#### **5.8.1.2. Openness towards the participants**

A particularly problematic ethical question concerns how much information a researcher should disclose to participants (Burgess, 1985b; Campbell, 2002). As it could be appreciated in the section concerning ‘access-negotiation’, the path taken was to be quite open with the teachers as to the purposes and the aims of the study. This attitude could be criticised, however, for the potential ‘contamination’ of the teachers’ behaviour, which could influence them, for instance, into carrying out more ‘participation-oriented’ activities with the children than they would normally have, in order to respond to a perception of social desirability. While taking this into account, it is not considered that this was a major factor in this particular case, for two reasons:

- a) Most teachers had many years of experience, seemed very secure of themselves and of the way they exercised their practice, and would not plausible that they would be concerned to change their ways just for the sake of the study. That is clearly manifested in Laura’s comment in the first meeting, when she says: ‘You’ll probably see ‘atrocious’ things in my class [thus indicating that she recognised there could be different positions in what regards participation] but you’re still welcome’.
- b) The other reason is substantiated by having spent the whole academic year at the school and having used a triangulated approach. It is believed that any initial behaviour or attitude expression which could be more susceptible to contamination, could be balanced and compared with consistent observation and surveying throughout the year.



It is believed that both these aspects contributed to attenuate contamination effects and to achieve a closer approach to each person's 'natural' behaviour (David, 2002). As Burgess (1985b) argues, it is never possible to reveal everything about the project but there should be a balance between what is ethically owed to the participants to disclose to them and what remains the domain of the researcher's thoughts and control over the project. That balance was attempted, especially by not revealing 'all' in the first meeting, but simultaneously sharing with the participants some control over the materials gathered, namely through respondent validation (see section 5.8.4.).

#### **5.8.1.3. Balance between non-participation and reciprocity**

As it can be appreciated in the present description, the option to hold a non-participant role (Campbell, 2002) was followed in this case study. Therefore, no tasks were performed in the school other than those related to research (Pollard, 1996). Furthermore, a maximum level of discretion was attempted when observing an activity in order to keep it as close to natural behaviour as possible (Bell, 1987, 1999). This involves, however, a number of issues: Burgess (1985b) argues that participants, many a time, forget that one is in the school as a researcher and that they are being the subjects of research. Therefore – and this has happened in this study – they might engage in certain behaviours or conversations with relative candour. Although keeping an ethical attitude in mind, in order not to fall into an abusive research relationship, it is also considered that 'it would have been impossible constantly to remind individuals that they were being studied' Burgess (1985b, p.49). One way to attenuate this is to ask participants for feedback on whatever material concerning them, namely through the negotiation of the content of their interviews. Nonetheless, it is believed that most people did not totally lose their awareness of the researcher's role: in fact, there were

two participants who asked to address more sensitive issues off the record. In two other instances, there were requests from teachers not to use certain pieces of information they had disclosed. On the four occasions, the participants' wishes were respected.

Another issue with adopting a non-participant role is that referred by Adelman (1985) and Burgess (1985b) who mention that, on many occasions, one has to forcefully refrain oneself from intervening. This was certainly the case in a meeting, described in chapter 6, regarding the class placement of children designated as having SEN. In general, in order to not be perceived as siding with one or another person or group (David, 2002), the researcher would not manifest an opinion if there was a discussion between opposite stances. These are part of the constraints of being in the field as a researcher and not as a practitioner: an intervention might lead to people losing trust in oneself as a researcher, which is something that cannot be risked (Adelman, 1985).

It is not considered that reciprocity as such was engaged upon (Campbell, 2002). There was only one occasion where there was a more direct intervention, although only a few months after having left Santa Maria. This posed a serious ethical dilemma, but it was decided that the unethical behaviour would have been not to intervene, as that would have represented non-assistance to a person who was potentially in danger; a concern which went much beyond the considerations regarding the role of the researcher. The situation in question involved a year 3 girl, who was described as very 'weird and unstable' by her teacher and as having 'quite a difficult family situation'. Two of the teachers mentioned they suspected that she was suffering abuse from her father. Also, when analysing the Susan Harter Profiles, it was noticed that her scores were strikingly and consistently low, indicating a somewhat negative self-perception. These elements supported the decision to take action in this case. Therefore – not mentioning any of the



rumours but simply that, based upon the results of the Harter profiles, it was felt that this girl's case was worth checking – this issue was referred to the psychologist at the local Educational Area Centre, who ensured she would look into the matter.

It is believed that these are situations that happen quite often when one engages in research within a social context, but that they should nonetheless be mentioned and analysed (Sikes, 1999). Burgess' (1985b, p.158) reflection sums up the position taken in this study with regards to these aspects: 'as field researchers we need to make public the ethical and political problems that we encounter in our research if we are to understand how compromise is to be achieved and how knowledge can be advanced alongside the protection of our informants'.

### **5.8.2. Consent**

One of the most important aspects in dealing with ethical requirements and the respect for the informants is that of obtaining their informed consent. This is defined as the 'freely given agreement on the part of the researched to become a subject of the research' (May, 1997, p.55). To this definition, it could perhaps be added 'being aware of the implications that carries'. This is particularly true and presents specific challenges when children are involved (Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Lindsay, 2000). With a research topic such as the one being studied, it was fundamental that the children's rights to information, as well as to make their own decisions, were respected (Jipson & Jipson, 2003). There is, primarily, a right to be informed in terms that are accessible to them, but not patronising, hence demonstrating a respect for their capacities as decision-makers (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). How this concern was operationalised is an aspect discussed ahead.

It was not less important, however, to seek also for adults' informed consent. As this process preceded chronologically that of the children's it will be addressed beforehand. One important consideration, particularly when working with institutions such as the Ministry of Education, its sub-structures or the schools, is to respect the hierarchies. And this is for two reasons: firstly, because the higher hierarchical levels normally hold the key to accessing the subsequent ones and, secondly, to avoid creating 'diplomatic incidents'. Therefore, one has to make sure to secure one level of consent before proceeding to its hierarchic subordinate. At the school level, in what concerns the head and the teachers, consent was mainly obtained in the already described meeting at the beginning of the project, with reminders of the guaranties offered whenever any of them was interviewed.

Concerning the parents, their consent must be seen as double-fold. On the one hand, there is their consent as participants themselves, when answering the questionnaires – which was obtained through an explicative introduction mentioning the study and its purposes – while, on the other hand, there is also their consent as legal guardians, with regards to the participation of their children. Following the principle of 'progressive access negotiation' the latter was sought in two distinct moments: one at the beginning of the year, through the parent-teacher meetings, in which the project was explained and consultation offered, asking for their consent to observe the classes; and one that accompanied the questionnaires, in the form of a letter, when direct intervention with the children was at considered (questionnaires and interviews).

It could therefore be argued that informed consent was sought for all the adults participating in this study. However, as mentioned above, a different range of issues has to be taken into consideration, when the research subjects are children. Traditionally,



the efforts to obtain the children's informed consent have been somewhat neglected (Burgess, 1985b; Pollard, 1996). It was often assumed that it would be enough to obtain consent from their 'adults-in-charge', i.e. parents and teachers (Lindsay, 2003), and that the children would naturally co-operate (Burgess, 1985b). On many occasions, this has happened by pure neglect; but in other instances, it occurred because the researchers assumed that children were not valid decision-makers or that they were unable to understand the implications of posing as subjects of research (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Warren, 2000). However, more recently, this view has been challenged. Many researchers have pointed out the need to debate these issues and to view children not only as being competent but also as having a right to give their consent, provided that the project is explained to them in terms they can understand (Gentry et al., 2002; Hodgkin & Newell, 1999; Kefyalew, 1996).

In this project, children were treated with the same respect as the rest of the participants and, therefore, it was equally important to seek their informed consent. Strategies had to be devised to make this possible in terms that they would understand but also where they could feel free not to participate. Children's consent was, therefore, sought in every occasion contact was established with them. At first, in a more general way, in the beginning of the school year. This was the longest intervention in the classrooms, as it comprised the researcher's and the project's introduction. Pollard's (1996) suggestion of telling the children that the researcher was writing a book about what was going on in the school was used, as it was felt this would be a good analogy for children to understand not only the project, but also what their role as subjects would be, i.e. that of characters in a book.

Their permission to observe their lessons was asked for. On this occasion, there was general acquiescence from the whole class and none of the children manifested their opposition. However, it is recognised that a certain social pressure factor toward participating might have played a role. That is one of the reasons that led, from then onwards, into asking for their *express* consent whenever an activity was developed with them. It is believed this was more adequate as it allowed for two boys to manifest their wish not to participate in one of the activities.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the activities proposed might have held a particular appeal for the children, because participating in them meant that they did not have to attend their regular lessons... It is believed, nonetheless, that the overall experience was positive for the children and many comments were received expressing how much they had enjoyed the activities, especially from the children that participated in the interviews. Pollard's (1996, p.294) premise 'that the children loved to be listened to and have their views taken seriously' was definitely verified.

### **5.8.3. Anonymity and confidentiality**

Anonymity and confidentiality were two guaranties offered to participants throughout the study. The following mechanisms were used to ensure them: as to the concerns with keeping anonymity, the attempt to safeguard this aspect involved: not naming the city where the study took place, as Santa Maria is a quite well known school in that city; replacing the names of the school, the teachers and the children with fictitious ones; and asking only for general information in the parents' questionnaires with no specific identification with regards to them or their children. It is hoped that these measures have been successful in protecting the identities of the participants but one should also



be aware that 'whatever precautions are taken to protect those involved in a field study, nothing is foolproof' (Burgess, 1985b, p.157).

Another concern was with maintaining confidentiality, as it was assured to all the participants that any information they transmitted would not be seen by anybody other than the researcher and would be used exclusively for research purposes. There were also occasions when participants asked specifically for certain information not to be used, which was respected. But keeping confidentiality was a continuous effort. This was particularly the case when the children were involved, as some teachers wanted to know what they had said in the interviews. However, the importance of not breaching confidentiality cannot be stressed enough (Walker, 1993, 1994) and, therefore, none of that information was disclosed to the teachers, with questions being dismissed by using only general comments to the effect that the interviews had gone very well.

#### **5.8.4. Respondent validation**

Although this aspect can be defined as a measure for controlling the quality of the research procedures and will be discussed as such ahead (section 5.9.), it is believed to involve an ethical question as well: the question of the ownership of the research materials, which can also be regarded as a matter of respect for the informants (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Sikes, 1999). Respondent validation involves cross-checking the information obtained with the participants, so that the interpretations do not belong solely to the researcher but are actually discussed and negotiated with them (Adelman, 1985; Walker, 1993, 1994). It also expresses a concern that the voices of the participants are conveyed in a clear and fair way (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; Pollard, 1996). The intention being praiseworthy, Adelman (1985) and Bell (1987, 1999) warn,

nevertheless, about holding a realistic approach as to the possibilities of carrying out this task. In the present case, for pragmatic reasons, respondent validation was limited to the teachers: once the interviews had been transcribed, copies were sent back to each individual teacher to be submitted to their appreciation, having all in return been approved by them.

## **5.9. Assessment of the research procedures**

Although this issue has been approached as the different aspects were being discussed, it seemed useful to present a summary analysis of the steps taken in trying to ensure the quality of the research procedures. This description will be organised in four sections addressing respectively:

- 5.9.1. The rigour of the procedures;
- 5.9.2. Internal or construct validity;
- 5.9.3. Generalisability or external validity;
- 5.9.4. Reliability.

These terms have generally been linked to a quantitative approach to research and their use in a qualitative sphere has been often criticised (Campbell, 2002; Pidgeon, 1996). However, they are also deemed appropriate in the frame of the methodological eclecticism in which this study is inscribed (Hammersley, 1996). These aspects will therefore be addressed with respect to their relevance within a case study approach.



### 5.9.1. The rigour of the procedures

Within a methodologically eclectic approach, the multiplicity of procedures suggests that different processes of ensuring quality have to be used (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). While those processes seem clear when quantitative techniques are involved, the preservation of quality in the use of qualitative approaches must not be neglected: less structured procedures, such as those used in ethnographic methods, do not necessarily imply a less rigorous approach to research (Woods, 1985; Wright, 2002). As May (1997, p.53) advances 'the above view does not lead to an 'anything goes' view of research. Certain standards are still needed in the conduct of research, particularly if the idea of a 'discipline' is to be maintained'. Therefore, as referred in the beginning of this chapter, rigour was at the forefront of concerns in any methods used in this study. The detailed description of the research procedures, up to this point, had the purpose of enabling an appreciation of the appropriateness of those procedures in the research conduct, as well as their specific evaluation (Walker, 1993, 1994). This derives mainly from the notion that description stands as one of the preferred tools when assessing quality in the context of case study and ethnographic research (Stenhouse, 1985).

As Shipman (1985, p.277) advances, in a somewhat a humorous manner, researchers should be 'frank and full about the methods that were used to collect the data. That enables peers and lay persons to assess credibility. But a frank and full account of open-ended observations [for instance] is likely to confirm to the outsider that ethnography is what inspectors do in a more detached way, teachers do in a more experienced way and journalists do in a more readable way'. This implies that simple description is not adapted to the assessment of all the types of techniques that were used, which leads to the next aspects of this summary.

### 5.9.2. Internal or construct validity

Internal or construct validity ‘refers to the need for correct and appropriate measures or methods for the construct being examined’ (Golby, 1994, p.21). This type of validity regards, hence, the ‘realism’ of the measures. Claiming to get closer to the actors’ perspectives, case study and qualitative research have generally been considered as making a ‘move towards a greater realism (and hence validity)’ (Henwood, 1996, p.33). The strategies to ensure internal validity will necessarily be dependent on the type of technique a researcher is using. For instance, in what regards a grounded theory approach, the concept of thick description, which relies on verisimilitude, is proposed (Charmaz, 2000; Stenhouse, 1985). However, this concept of ‘face validity’ or ‘the judgement that the results seem to fit the reality’ (Walker, 1993, 1994, p.178), in which case study often relies, is very much criticised by psychometricians.

Hence, Hammersley (1996) and Pollard (1996, pp.302-303) propose ‘three main strategies available to qualitative researchers in working to maintain validity’, which were followed in the present study. These comprise:

*Unobtrusive data gathering:* ‘low-key, non-participant role’, as it allows for the participants’ behaviour to be as close to normal as possible;

*Respondent validation:* ‘in other words, a researcher’s interpretations should subsequently be recognizable when presented to the participants in the study or to others within a similar social and interactional context. (...) If participants agree with the researcher’s account, then greater confidence can be attached to it’ (Pidgeon, 1996, p.84).

*Triangulation:* multiple triangulation, including ‘variety of types of data; different times and situations; more than one researcher involved’ (Pollard, 1996, p.303), as it



allows for a more complete picture of a situation, not just depending on a single point of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

### **5.9.3. Generalisability or external validity**

This concept refers to the possibilities of the results being extended or transferred to other settings (Dimitrov, 2002). Being one of the terms more linked with a quantitative approach – in what concerns a ‘statistical generalisability’ – case studies are normally accused of performing poorly with regards to this aspect. However, generalisation in statistical terms is not the purpose of a case study (Hammersley, 1996): many authors claim that external validity should not even be discussed in the context of case study research, for being too positivistic an approach (Golby, 1994; Pidgeon, 1996). Pollard (1996, p.304) argues, on the other hand, that ‘the [case] study provides an empirically valid account of the issues on which it has been focused but [there is] no claim for the empirical generalization of specific substantive findings’. This author proposes, therefore, that an approach of ‘theoretical inference’ should be used, by which ‘analytical’ or ‘theoretical’ generalisation is not only possible in the context of a case study, but even welcome. This stems from the view that ‘despite their diversity, individual classrooms share many characteristics. Through the detailed study of one particular context it is still possible to clarify relationships, pinpoint critical processes and identify common phenomena. Later, abstracted summaries and general concepts can be formulated, which may, upon further investigation, be found to be germane to a wider variety of settings’ (Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, 1994, p.36). It is hoped that this was attained in this study.

#### 5.9.4. Reliability

Another criticism that has often been pointed out to case study research, is that it enhances validity at the expenses of reliability (Dimitrov, 2002; Henwood, 1996). If reliability is considered as strict replicability, it has necessarily to be admitted that a case study – being the examination of a particular instance – will never perform well (Walker, 1993, 1994). More recently, however, some have claimed that the emphasis should rather be put in the rigour of the procedures, thus enhancing a ‘procedural reliability’ which is possible and appropriate in case study research (Henwood, 1996; Walker, 1993, 1994). As Golby (1994, p.22) argues ‘reliability is sought, in a technical sense, by careful and explicit documentation and the construction of a separate evidence-based or archive of source material. This should, ideally, enable other researchers to follow the steps and processes taken in the case study work and to transfer them to their own contexts’. As it is witnessed by most of the description in this chapter, this approach guided the data collection in the current study.

On the other hand, when more accurate measures were sought, a quantitative-oriented reliability assessment was performed with the intention to demonstrate the stability of the measures (Wright, 2002). That was the case of:

- the observation schedule, for which a 69.3% inter-observer reliability was obtained;
- the categorisation system, for which a 86.4% inter-coder reliability was obtained;
- the parents’ questionnaires’ categorisation system, for which a 87.3% inter-coder reliability was obtained;
- the children’s ‘participation scale’, for which a 0.80 Cronbach’s alpha was obtained.



This ends the section pertaining to the data collection. In fact, it should be recognised that ‘simply using a variety of methods does not guarantee validity or reliability. Different methods produce different sorts of evidence, so the challenge becomes one of how to integrate methods inside a rationale for the work and a developing understanding as it progresses’ (Golby, 1994, pp.23-24). The following section addresses, therefore, the data analysis and the development of an integrative framework, which is believed to be encompassing and explanatory of those data.

#### **5.10. Data analysis and the development of a framework**

The above-described process of data collection had the purpose of fuelling the reflection and contributing to the exploration of the research questions proposed, i.e.:

Question 1: How can the ‘exercised right to participation’ in the primary school be defined?

Question 2: What are the factors that influence such participation?

Its triangulated nature provided multiple types of information, which needed to be organised in order to attain those objectives (Golby, 1994). Aside from the preliminary analysis that was performed in each set of data, an integrative model was judged as necessary so that such information would become manageable and understandable (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Weitzman, 2000). As mentioned in chapter 4, the creation of a *set of indicators* developed with the purpose of identifying whether an educational setting can be classified as a participation-oriented ethos or not was judged as an appropriate tool. Some considerations – stemming from both literature and reflection – had to be taken into account with regards to that analytical process and to any potential

set created. It was deemed necessary for that instrument to embody the following properties:

- 1 - That it was easy to use and interpret (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996);
- 2 - That it was not simply a list of variables (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996);
- 3 - That it would encompass quantitative as well as qualitative information (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996);
- 4 - That it would address the *implementation* of children's right to participate in school, beyond the identification of hypothetical degrees of participation (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997);
- 5 - That it was accurate enough to distinguish a situation where child participation is present from one in which it is not [although not forgetting that participation should be viewed as evolving in a *continuum* (Gersch, 1987; 1992)], i.e. that it could clearly oppose a description of a participation-oriented behaviour / attitude, etc. to one that was not;
- 6 - That it would include the data that had been collected from a variety of sources (triangulation) for purposes of validity;
- 7 - That it would be appropriate for this specific case study but that it would be encompassing enough to be used in future and different settings, i.e. that it would be a basic framework adaptable to different situations (Casas, 1997);
- 8 - That it could be used to analyse the different types of events that can occur in a school (e.g. both curricular and extra-curricular).
- 9 - That it was also a way to integrate and analyse *all* the gathered data in an organised fashion, i.e. using only the relevant information, instead of proceeding to a bulk analysis of the elements collected.

The indicator set that was created taking these aspects into account is presented in Appendix 7 and will be described in the following sections.



### **5.10.1. Decisions regarding the development of the indicator set**

#### **5.10.1.1. The use of the elements that compose the ‘inalienable right’ view**

It was decided to assess exercised participation according to the concept of participation as an ‘inalienable’ right for children as this was judged to be the most encompassing view. Therefore, the decision was also taken to use the elements that compose that view in order to organise the set of indicators. The way each of them was used in the set is briefly described below:

##### *Element 1 - Being universal in its scope and exercise*

This element is intended to be a measure of general participation. It tries to define the extent to which participation is perceived as a right by the different participants. It assesses also whether the context being studied possesses the structures, procedures and mechanisms to enable child participation and whether that participation is effectively taking place.

##### *Element 2 - Being against any form of discrimination undermining the access to the right*

This element of the indicator set addresses the issue of non-discrimination in the access to the exercise of participation rights. It assesses this issue from the premise that if participation is considered as a right, then it is necessary to investigate whether that right is accessible to all children in the context being studied. This concern is founded by certain tendencies in the literature, namely within the statutory dispositions, which are many a time discriminatory against certain children based on personal characteristics or developmental criteria (Verhellen, 1993). It should be noted, however,

that this process is not undertaken with the intention of producing indicators to evaluate the integration or inclusion of children designated as having SEN but only to assess the extent to which that status has an influence on their access to the main fora of participation.

### *Element 3 - Sharing a non-traditional conception of the child and childhood*

This element of the indicator set is intended to address the participants' conceptions about children and childhood as well as to explore whether their behaviour is in relation with such conceptions. This is done following the premise that a participation-oriented attitude and ethos should, in principle and according to the literature, be accompanied by a non-traditional conception of children and childhood (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997), i.e. one that portrays children in very positive terms, as capable and competent human beings, as subjects and not objects of rights, not patronising or seeing them as untrustworthy.

### *Element 4 - Focusing on the psychological benefits participation has for the child*

If the results of any individual element of the indicator set need to be taken with prudence, that principle is particularly adequate in what regards the current one. This element is intended to investigate the existence of a relationship between child participation and various psychological benefits: on the one hand, it is interesting to appreciate whether the participants conceive participation as bringing such benefits to children; on the other hand, its purpose is also to assess whether perceived or actual participation is accompanied by the mastery of certain skills or other positive features in children. This latter aspect is where prudence is mostly necessary; in fact, the keyword in the previous sentence is *accompanied*, as no causality link is being put forward here. In no way does this instrument claim that participation *causes* improvements, for



instance, on self-esteem or the development of particular skills. Still, this characteristic of the ‘inalienable right’ view on participation was explored in the context of this research with the intent of determining whether, in a non-causal way, one or more positive features in various domains were associated with participation.

#### *Element 5 - Being fundamental for the advancement of democracy and citizenship*

This element of the indicator set is intended to evaluate whether an aspect the literature identifies as one of the pillars of participation is present in a given context. In fact, many are of the opinion that true participation is impossible without a democratic system being in place (Freeman, 1992b; Hart & Schwab, 1997). This element addresses, therefore, the participants’ attitudes towards the pertinence of such a system in a primary school context, as well as its influence in the actual management of the school. It deals also with the concept of child citizenship, being supposed to evaluate the extent to which democracy and the exercise of citizenship rights are seen as something to be *learned* by children so that they are prepared for their future adult life or, on the other hand, that children, in the present and with their current capabilities, are able to and should *live* in a democratic system in the different contexts that surround them, including school.

#### *Element 6 - Being a matter of power-sharing*

Complementary to the previous one, this section of the indicator set addresses the level to which adults are willing or able to share with children the power they hold over decision-making and teaching and learning processes.

#### 5.10.1.2. The use of ‘background’ and ‘event-related’ indicators

For each of the above-described elements, it was also deemed necessary to consider *two* types of indicators. In fact, from the beginning it was noticed that not all the indicators were of the same nature. Therefore, the need emerged to include one section concerning the *background indicators* (to be filled in only once) which fulfils the purpose of establishing whether a background is participation-oriented or not; and another section to assess the *event-related indicators* (to be filled in according to need, i.e. in a multiplicity of occasions and events: a lesson, a play, a meeting, etc.) which fulfils the purpose of establishing whether (and how) children participated in a given event. Both the combination and the comparison of the two types of indicators allow for the discussion on the presence or absence of a participation-oriented ethos.

It is believed that this constitutes also another form of triangulation: the fact that the two types of indicators are separated allows for multiple events to be combined within the ‘event-related section’ and, then, be compared with what was indicated in the ‘background section’. For example, a teacher might mention in the interview that they use a certain type of material but, through observation that might not be verified, which provides matter for an interesting discussion.

One of the main points regarding the specific issue of triangulation (which also responds to consideration no. 4 and to criticisms to previous approaches, such as the ‘statutory view’) is that one can never stop research on participation at the level of what one is being told or what is written in the documents analysed, let alone take these two aspects for the ‘reality’. The type of indicator set proposed allows for the confrontation



of behaviour with discourse and the verification of whether the former is consistent with the latter.

#### **5.10.1.3. The formulation of the indicators**

In order to respond to considerations nos. 2, 7 and 8, it was decided to create a set that included specific behaviours, attitudes, etc. These were, nonetheless, described in abstract contexts, so that they could be used in multiple school-related situations, events or contexts, thus being more flexible. In the ‘event-related sections’, there was always a space for the indication of the context that was being considered (e.g. a lesson / group of lessons, a meeting, a play, etc.). This was also motivated by the impossibility of specifically categorising all possible indicators of participation in every context. The task would not only be endless, producing an unmanageable set of indicators, but the latter would always be bound to criticism for not being fully comprehensive. In practical terms, this meant that, instead of formulating many questions involving the same type of behaviour in different contexts, e.g.

- did children give their opinion about the planning of the lesson?;
- did children give their opinion about the unfolding of the play?;
- did children give their opinion about the assessment of their worksheet?;

The formulation would rather be:

- did the activity / event involve children giving their opinion?

The advantage of this type of indicator set is that it is not limited to the enumeration of a list of desirable outcomes (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996), but it specifies how those can

actually be assessed. It does not limit itself to a statement such as ‘the children should be consulted’, but it identifies clearly what kind of attitude and behaviour must be present, so that one can consider that children were actually consulted. In other words, it operationalises / brings ‘flesh and bone’ to what were previously abstractly formulated prepositions. According to the literature, this kind of exercise had not yet been performed in this field (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997).

#### **5.10.1.4. The filling in and response system**

It was also decided that the filling in system would be in the form of a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to the initial questions. This had the goal of simplifying the response system as well as the interpretation. Therefore, all the questions were formulated in such a way that a ‘yes’ answer would correspond to a more participation-oriented situation, whereas a ‘no’ answer would correspond mostly to a non-participation-oriented situation. In practice, this meant that the first sentence of the operationalised indicator would always correspond to the affirmative answer and the second part (separated by a ‘OR’ in capitals) would describe the opposite situation, leading to a negative answer (see Appendix 7). However, the actual result would always be indicated as well, on the one hand to justify the response, and on the other, to include a qualitative element, which was very useful for the analysis as well as the discussion. Example:

Question: Do teachers portray themselves as capable of working in a participatory way?

Operationalisation: Teachers refer to their work as participation-oriented (which would imply a ‘yes’ answer) OR refer ‘not liking’ / ‘being incapable’ / ‘unable to work in such way’ (thus leading to a negative answer).



Result: 5/8 teachers (62.5%) would be qualified as a 'yes', then the conclusion for the majority of the school is that 'yes, teachers portray themselves as capable of working in a participatory way'.

Furthermore, explicit operationalisation will hopefully allow for the use of the indicator set in other contexts, with the necessary cultural and contextual adaptations. It is believed this type of instrument allows for a researcher to observe a situation, confront it with the set of operationalised indicators and discuss that situation in terms of its participation characteristics.

#### **5.10.2. The process of building the indicator set**

This process started by the collection of questions / possible indicators in a deductive (literature) and inductive (reflection; fieldwork) manner: all the literature was reviewed, once again, and each of the data sets proceeding from the fieldwork – documents, questionnaires, interviews, observation schedules, field-notes – was fully examined. The questions proceeding from these sources were organised according to the six previously described elements of the 'inalienable right' view on participation, i.e.:

- a) Being universal in its scope and exercise;
- b) Being against any form of discrimination undermining the access to the right;
- c) Sharing a non-traditional conception of the child and childhood;
- d) Focusing on the psychological benefits participation has for the child;
- e) Being fundamental for the advancement of democracy and citizenship;
- f) Being a matter of power-sharing.

As the elements are permeable, one question can eventually pertain to more than one characteristic. The decision had to be taken to place each question collected in the element considered the most relevant, always keeping in mind, however, that this is motivated more by a pragmatic need of organisation, as there are no such artificial barriers in reality.

It was then decided, for each question collected, what type of indicator would best address it (e.g. observable indicator; documentary indicator; etc.) as well as where data could be found in order to address it (e.g. in the school's educational plan; in interviews; in questionnaires; in observation schedules, etc.). The questions were transformed into operational terms (the actual indicators) for a systematic appraisal of each of them. Following this stage it was decided whether an indicator was part of the 'background' or was 'event-related', thus creating the two different sections for each element.

The order in which the indicators were placed in the set tried to maintain a logical sequence and fluidity. However, in some instances, that order was later on reviewed. As the statistical analysis had already been performed, it would be difficult to re-code all the indicators, that being the reason why some are not presented in a fully ascendant order. This aspect will have to be reviewed in future versions of the set.

The two sections ('background' and 'event-related') were, then, adapted to the school, classroom and individual levels, i.e. each indicator was considered in terms of the pertinence it held with regards to each of these levels. With the objective of reducing the indicator set to the minimum length possible, it was also necessary to proceed to the review, elimination, adaptation or merging of indicators according to their relevance.



Therefore, the final presentation of the indicator set, which can be appreciated in Appendix 7 and was used as a framework for the data presented and analysed in the following chapters, includes the elements below.

There are twelve sections deriving from the fact that the set encompasses the six elements of the ‘inalienable right’ view described above, which are divided into ‘background’ and ‘event-related’ indicators (6 elements x 2 types of indicators = 12 sections). As explained, these can be used either as a whole or independently from one another. All sections include the following elements (please refer to Appendix 7):

**Indicator:** identifies the code attributed to each indicator. Those that start with a ‘B’ correspond to background indicators, while those that do not, correspond to event-related indicators.

**Source:** identifies the element that inspired or was at the basis of each indicator. It can refer to an element in the literature, an aspect of the field-work, personal reflection or any combination between these sources.

**Type of indicator:** corresponds to the aspect that is intended to be reached by the indicator. It can refer to any of the participants’ perceptions, documentary evidence, observable events, etc.

**What to know?:** this is the fundamental question that the data collected for each indicator will try to respond to. They are all formulated in such a way that a ‘yes’ answer is believed to correspond to a more participation-oriented situation and a ‘no’ answer to a less participation-oriented one. However, these are still not operational elements.

**Where to find?:** corresponds to the actual stance where the information to answer the previous question is believed to be found. It involves a multiplicity of different elements: interviews, questionnaires, observation schedules, etc.

**How to know?:** entails the operationalisation of the indicator, i.e. the pragmatic procedure to be followed in order to determine the presence, the absence or the degree of a given indicator.

**School / Class / Individual level:** it was considered necessary to adapt the indicator set to the school, the classroom and individual levels using only for each level the most relevant indicators. This also allows for the indicators pertaining to each level to be used independently in the future, i.e. a researcher might want to assess solely the school level; or a specific classroom; or an individual child's participation and would not need to use the whole set but only those indicators judged as appropriate for each of the levels. To that effect, in Appendix 7, ✓ corresponds to indicators that have effectively been used in this study, while ✓ corresponds to indicators that it was not deemed appropriate to use in the course of this study (at certain levels) but that are possible to apply in future research undertakings or in other contexts.

N.B. At the school level, for some indicators, which did not involve exclusively whole-school events, it was considered that the conglomerated results of the classrooms should be used to draw the portrait of the whole school. This decision is also supported by the fact that, to a great extent, the school was organised as a conglomerate of classes (see chapter 6).

It is believed that these aspects can be best understood when the presentation of the way they were used is carried out in the following chapters. Finally, it should be mentioned that this version of the instrument is still an experimental one, which was created to serve the purposes of this specific piece of research: only with repetition and practice could it be defined what is missing or what needs to be added. It is more of a basis upon which each researcher / practitioner can develop with regards to their own needs.

The results of the application of the instrument in Santa Maria school as well as their analysis, constitute the object of the following chapters.



# Chapter 6

## Results and analysis at the school level

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the results pertaining to the local level of inquiry, i.e. the school as a whole. The argument rests primarily on the quantitative material gathered in relation to every (pertinent) element comprised in the set of indicators (annex 7) while some findings are further substantiated by the use of qualitative data (Tierney, 2002). The chapter’s structure is as follows: the first section provides a general assessment of the school’s overall ethos, as more or less participation-oriented; the second section delivers a comprehensive account of all applicable elements included in the indicator set; while the concluding section focuses on the specific contribution of the data collected and/ or analysed at the school level. The aim of the latter section is mainly to formulate an ensemble of more definite research questions and hypotheses, which will then be addressed in chapters 7 and 8.

### 6.2. Overall results and preliminary analysis

Table 6.1: Overall results at the school level

Background results					Event-related results				
Elements	Positive result	Negative result	50 - 50	TOTAL	Elements	Positive result	Negative result	50 - 50	TOTAL
BU	11 (57.9%)	5 (26.3%)	3 (15.8%)	19	U	5 (45.4%)	5 (45.5%)	1 (9.1%)	11
BD	3 (27.3%)	6 (54.6%)	2 (18.2%)	11	D	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	2 (25%)	8
BN	6 (27.3%)	13 (59.1%)	3 (13.6%)	22	N	1 (16.7%)	3 (50%)	2 (33.3%)	6
BP	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)	5	P	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
BDC	7 (38.9%)	8 (44.4%)	3 (16.7%)	18	DC	0 (0%)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4
BPW	5 (27.8%)	10 (55.6%)	3 (16.7%)	18	PW	1 (14.3%)	5 (71.4%)	1 (14.3%)	7
TOTAL	36 (39.4%)	43 (45.7%)	14	93 (100%)	TOTAL	9 (25%)	20 (55.6%)	7 (19.4%)	36 (100%)



The key to this table, as well as to the rest of the tables presented in this chapter, is the following:

**Elements:** refers to the different elements of the indicator set (explained in chapter 5), which were based on the six characteristics of the ‘inalienable right’ view. Whenever preceded by a ‘B’, these elements pertain to background indicators, and when not, they pertain to event-related indicators. Hence:

**BU / U:** refer to element 1 – Universality of the right and its exercise;

**BD / D:** refer to element 2 – Non-discrimination in the access to participation;

**BN / N:** refer to element 3 – Non-traditional conception of children and childhood;

**BP / P:** refer to element 4 – Participation being beneficial for children;

**BDC / DC:** refer to element 5 – Development of democracy and citizenship;

**BPW / PW:** refer to element 6 – Participation as a powersharing issue.

Complementarily, it is also recommended to resort to annex 7 for the interpretation of the indicators as, owing to space constraints, it was impossible to include in the current tables the information pertaining to the ‘operationalisation’ of the indicators.

At the outset, it should be recalled that this section’s main focus is upon providing an overview of the school’s situation (with regards to participation), rather than being the core of the analysis. In fact, as stated in the methodology chapter, prudence is of the essence when considering the results as solely ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ (see table 6.1), for all indicators do not have the same valence, nor qualitative weight. Still, this table should yield a first rendition of the school’s overall situation and serve as a foundation to the more refined analysis presented in the coming sections.



One should note, moreover, that whenever indicators related to teachers' perceptions and/ or class observation are considered, the analysis is circumscribed to the eight classes contained in the research sample (as defined in Chapter 5). For the purpose of the current chapter, their aggregate results are considered as representative of all classrooms and, by extension, of the school as a whole. Hence, a score of '50-50' would indicate that four out of the eight classes obtained a positive value, while the remainder espoused a negative one. This type of result could indicate a rift of opinion at the school level. Therefore, the 'positive', 'negative' and '50-50' results presented in the table's columns represent the number of indicators with that valence in each of the elements explained above. These are accompanied also by the value in percentage within the totality of indicators that were collected.

Having addressed these issues, it is now possible to concentrate in the actual results presented in the table: outright, table 6.1 paints a grim portrait of children's participation, as the number of elements in which negative results are predominant – marked in grey – clearly surpass those in which positive results prevail. Furthermore, the elements that exhibit negative results on the background dimension also do so on the event-related section; an aspect which can be taken as an indication of the set's internal coherence (Golby, 1994).

Such findings would suggest, therefore, that Santa Maria school does not qualify as a highly participatory-oriented ethos. Indeed, perhaps one of the most interesting facets revealed by the overall results is the lack of a consistent policy and practice in the domain of child participation. Further support to that idea can be found in the fact that, in at least two separate instances, significant discrepancies within the school's overall results can be detected: first, the pro-participatory content of the school's educational

plan – which is also reflected in the head's discourse – appears inconsistent with the scores obtained on most indicators generated through the aggregation of class results; second, a lack of congruency seems to exist when the results of the individual classes are compared.

In what concerns the former, the problem appears to reside in that the favourable attitude towards participation found in the educational plan's letter and head teacher's discourse does not seem to trickle down to the classrooms, or easily make its way into the teaching practice. An explanation as to why that happens might have been volunteered by the head herself, as she expressed a certain powerlessness with regards to the influence her line of thought could bear upon the work being carried out at the classroom level:

'It works this way: each teacher... [interrupts] if you go into each of the 13 classes, in each of them the work will be different. None of them is the same as the other, isn't it? And then, there are some teachers who respect more... the pupils' rights, and there are others who respect them less, isn't it? Some of them give the children the right to speak up and express their opinion and others don't, isn't it? But when it comes to that, *I can't control anything of what goes on in the classroom...* It depends on the type of management that each teacher has of his or her class.'

(Alicc's interview on 26/01/00, emphasis added).

Additionally, it could be advanced that the teachers' lack of adherence to the principles found in the school's educational plan appears to stem from the fact that most of them do not use the aforementioned document in their daily practice, yet alone are aware of its content. Indeed, for a majority of teachers, commitment to the principles expressed in the educational plan appears to be scarce, if at all existent. The following explanation is possible: as it was confirmed by the head in one of her interviews (18/10/1999), the



school's educational plan had been conceived by a group of four teachers (of which she was a member) who volunteered to do so at the end of the previous school year (1998/1999). One could wager that, perhaps because they did not participate in its elaboration, nor found their personal values reflected in the spirit of the document, most teachers gave little consideration to its guidelines.

An indication of such wavering interest is exemplified by the teachers' timid response to the head's offer to provide a copy of the plan to each member of the staff in one of the first school council's meetings. The fact that the school council's minutes only give a partial account of that proposal is also most revealing (school council minutes, 09/11/1999): in fact, the staff's response to the proposal was never recorded, and it is believed this was not an innocent omission. However, the researcher's field-notes, gathered at the same meeting, allow for a rendition of what followed the head's proposal:

*Alice*      Ok, who would like to have a copy of the school's educational plan?

*Ruth*      I already have one [she was one of the teachers that had elaborated the plan].

*Julia*      Why would I want that? I don't need it...

*Lucia*      I'd have one, please...

*Eunice*      Me too...

*Laura*      Hum, I know why you want one... It's for your daughters, isn't it?

Lucia and Eunice nod. [Both teachers' daughters were training to be teachers themselves].

(Researcher's field-notes, school council meeting, 09/11/99)

Consequently, only two teachers (out of twenty) requested a copy of the educational plan. Furthermore, if increased evidence were needed of the little importance awarded to such a document, these two teachers even stated an intention of not using it themselves, but rather to provide their daughters with an example of an educational

plan, which would help them in their teacher-training programme. In short, the school’s educational plan, which in a way is how statutory dispositions materialise at the local level, did not seem to contribute to the development of a participation-oriented ethos.

Another level of discrepancy, existing within the indicators generated through the aggregation of the classes’ results, tends to confirm the non-existence of a cohesive school policy and practice in the domain of participation. As mentioned above, these indicators referred either to the eight class teachers’ perceptions, or to elements observed in those classrooms with regards to their functioning. Were there a cohesive policy and practice, a certain harmony would be expected between the eight classes’ results (Vibert, et al., 2002): i.e., either demonstrating positive or negative results, it would be expected that the number of classes sharing the same type of results would be high. Table 6.2 presents the distribution of the actual results regarding the 65 pertinent indicators and demonstrated how many classes – out of the eight being considered – did in fact share the same results:

Table 6.2: Distribution of results of the 65 indicators generated through the aggregation of the classes’ results

Number of classes	Positive result	Negative result	TOTAL
8/8 classes (100%)	1 (1.5%)	3 (4.6%)	4 (6.2%)
7/8 classes (87.5%)	3 (4.6%)	2 (3.1%)	5 (7.7%)
6/8 classes (75%)	6 (9.2%)	7 (10.8%)	13 (20%)
5/8 classes (62.5%)	8 (12.3%)	14 (21.5%)	22 (33.9%)
50-50 classes (50%)	21 (32.3%)		21 (32.3%)
TOTAL			65 (100%)

As it can be appreciated in the table (table 6.2), the number of indicators in which classes tended to portray the same results, i.e. those where the shared results amount to 87.5% or 100% of the classes, is much lower than those in which the discrepancy of results dominates. In fact, the cases in which the results were scattered between the



classes – i.e. those where the shared results do not exceed 50% or 62.5% – account for over 65% of the total indicators. These results tend to not only confirm the absence of a coherent whole-school line of thought on these issues, but they justify the relevance of deeply analysing the classroom level in this particular school; an analysis which will be undertaken in chapter 7.

Still, these results are only indicative of the school's overall performance. The analysis of the school level would not be complete without the appreciation of its performance with regards to the different elements of the indicator set. That analysis will take place in the following sections of this chapter and will aim at a more refined evaluation of the school's performance with respect to the various aspects of the 'inalienable right' view on participation rights.

### **6.3. Element 1: Universality of the right and its exercise**

#### **6.3.1. Background results and analysis**

At first glance, when confronted with this section of the indicator set, the school seems to score very well, demonstrating almost 60% of positive results (table 6.3). This would tend to indicate that the vast majority of children were provided with a good context and appropriate conditions for the exercise of participation rights. Discrepancies between the participants' perceptions can be noticed, however, right at the first – and all important – indicators regarding whether each group of participants considers participation as a right for children (BU1 to BU5): if the answer is positive in the case of the school's educational plan, the head, and the parents, the number of positive results drops to 50% in the teachers' case. Furthermore and quite interestingly, the children's perception is totally opposite to the adults': 100% negative results.

**Table 6.3: School level background results for Element 1 of the indicator set  
(Universality of the right and its exercise)**

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
BU5	Documentary	Is participation considered as a right for children?	School's educational project	Yes 'this school wants to instil in our children democratic values, such as participation'
BU1	Head's perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Interview	Yes 'they spend most of their time here... I believe they have the right to say what they think'
BU2	Teachers' perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers.
BU3	Children's perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Interviews	No (20/ 20 children's answers = 100% of the valid cases)
BU4	Parents' perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Questionnaires	Yes (school average = 17.8% which is above random expectancy)
BU6	Documentary	Does the school subscribe to an educational movement endorsing participation ideals? If yes, which?	School's educational project	No
BU7	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers belong to or identify with an educational movement endorsing participation ideals? If yes, which?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers.
BU8	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers value 'active' pedagogies?	Interviews	Yes (6/8 teachers' answers = 75%)
BU9	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray participation as a fundamental aspect of their practice?	Interviews	Yes (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BU10	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray themselves as capable of working in a participation-oriented way?	Interviews	Yes (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BU11	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers present a non-limited view on participation?	Interviews	Yes (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BU13	Children's perceptions	Do children portray teachers in participation-oriented terms?	Interviews	No (18/32 children's answers = 56.3%)
BU12	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils in participation situations?	Interviews	Yes (23/32 children's answers = 71.9%)
BU14	Children's perceptions	Do children consider their current participation as positive?	Questionnaires	Yes (school average on participation scales = 2.58 in a 4 point scale)
BU15	Children's perceptions	Does children's perceived current participation meet up with their desired participation?	Questionnaires	No (4/4 classrooms in years 3 and 4 = 100% valid cases in which average desired participation > average actual participation)
BU16	Children's perceptions	Do children make claims for a more participation-oriented / active school?	Interviews	Yes (28/32 children's answers = 87.5%)
BU17 A,B,C	Children's perceptions	Do children perceive their participation as similar in different moments?	Questionnaires	Yes (5/8 class average = 62.5%)
BU18	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation?	School: informal observation notes	No for school in general
BU19	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation?	Classroom: informal observation notes	50-50 (classrooms)

These discrepancies can be interpreted as yet another example of the above-mentioned lack of whole-school cohesiveness in this domain. It must be said that in the children's



case, the ‘right to participation’ might perhaps be too abstract a notion to be spontaneously mentioned. Still, in none of the rights mentioned by the children was any element even vaguely related with participation – e.g. having the right to say what they think – ever alluded to.

Proceeding in the domain of perceptions, whenever indicators regarding a belief in participation-oriented methodology (e.g. BU8, BU11) and a perceived capacity to work in such way (e.g. BU9, BU10) are concerned, the teachers’ response is generally positive (between 62.5% and 75% positive answers). The positive results are, however, related solely to the teachers’ discourse and need to be put into perspective through a comparison with the elements associated with their practice. Indeed, even at this juncture, the majority (56.3%) of children’s appreciation of such practice is not very favourable (BU13). Regarding the perception of their own participation, however, children draw a positive picture (BU12, BU14). Still, they seem to indicate not being totally satisfied with their current level of participation (BU15), which they would seemingly like to see increased (BU16). The positive results, with regards to children’s perceptions can perhaps be explained by the existence of a certain level of satisfaction deriving more from participation in the classroom, than in the school as a whole. This is substantiated by the fact that, in what concerns the existence of structures (e.g. a school council with the presence of children reps) and mechanisms (e.g. suggestion boxes; a school newspaper) to enable participation, the school performs poorly (BU18), as they were utterly absent.

6.3.2. Event-related results and analysis

Table 6.4: School level event-related results for Element 1 of the indicator set  
(Universality of the right and its exercise)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
U1	Observable	Is the activity part of everyday school life?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: observation schedules	Yes (8/8 classrooms = 100%)
U2	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation in the activity?	School: informal observation notes	No
U3	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation in the activity?	Classroom: informal observation notes	No (5/8 classrooms = 62.5%)
U4	Observable	Are children intervening in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	Yes School average: 46.5%
U5	Observable	Does the activity involve children being informed?	Classroom: observation schedules	No (8/8 classrooms = 100%)
U6	Observable	Does the activity involve children being consulted?	Classroom: observation schedules	Yes School average: 6.2% of total
U7	Observable	Does the activity involve children giving their opinion?	Classroom: observation schedules	Yes (6/8 classrooms = 75%) School average: 12.1% of total
U9	Observable	Is there a low incidence of direct instruction from the teacher?	Classroom: observation schedules	No School average: 50.7%
U10	Observable	Do children do instruction / present their work to the others?	Classroom: observation schedules + informal observation notes	No (8/8 classrooms = 100%) School average: 0.5%
U11	Observable	Is there a low incidence of children's individual tasks?	Classroom: observation schedules	50 – 50 classrooms School average: 10%
U12	Observable	Do children maintain their participation in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	Yes (7/8 classrooms = 87.5%) School average of off-task interactions: 1.7%
U13 A p,n (420) B p,n (920) C p,n (1720) D p,n (320) E p,n (1320) F p,n (total)	Observable	Do child-initiated interactions have a positive impact in the unfolding of the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	Yes  A: School average 420 (management expression) positive impact = 3.5% School average 420 (management expression) negative impact = 5.1%  B: School average 920 (behaviour expression) positive impact = 1% School average 920 (behaviour expression) negative impact = 4.2%  C: School average 1720 (curriculum expression) positive impact = 38.5% School average 1720 (curriculum expression) negative impact = 25.4%  D: School average 320 (management question) positive impact = 6.7% School average 320 (management question) negative impact = 2.1%  E: School average 1320 (curriculum question) positive impact = 9.2% School average 1320 (curriculum question) negative impact = 3.9%  F: School average total positive impact = 59.3% School average total negative impact = 40.7%
U15 A (DM) B (TLT) C (Assess)	Observable	Is the level of participation maintained similar in different moments?	Classroom: observation schedules	No (8/8= 100%)  School average DM: 4.7%  School average TLT: 57.3%  School average Assess: 31.1%



When compared with the background data, several positive aspects come forth from the analysis of the event-related indicators in this section (table 6.4): Although the absence of formal mechanisms and structures enabling child participation (U2, U3) still seems to be an issue, children are, in general – and many times informally – being consulted (U6) and giving their opinion in class (U7); two elements considered by the Council of Europe (1996) as fundamental for an appropriate exercise of participation.

Furthermore, once engaged in the activity, not only do children tend to maintain their participation at high levels (U12) but their contributions seem to be having a positive impact in the interactions (U13) as teachers' response to such interventions is generally positive (59.3% total average of positive impact). These results would tend to confirm the interpretation provided with regards to the background, in the sense that the children's level of satisfaction is accounted for by their participation in the classroom, rather than by the participation in the school itself.

Still, even if the general results appear to be positive, the importance of the nature and quality of the children's participation should not be overlooked: if the level of participation in basic teaching and learning tasks (TLT) seems to be satisfactory (U15, TLT = 57.3%), it appears that when more advanced forms of participation are considered – such as children participating in decision-making (DM) procedures (U15, DM = 4.5%) and performing instruction tasks (U10, school average = 0.5%) – the results clearly drop to much lower values.

As a general conclusion for the appreciation of the school's performance regarding the 'Universality' aspect of the 'inalienable right' view on the right to participation, an idea arising from the children's perceptions will be borrowed: although there is a reasonable

level of participation, especially in what concerns the classroom activities, the level of the whole-school participation could still be improved. According to the results, that improvement could encompass, for instance, the introduction of more advanced forms of participation than the ones already in place (e.g. children participating in decision-making procedures). It could also involve the development of formal structures and mechanisms that would enable such participation. The latter aspect is, in fact, one of the factors indicated by Osler (1998) and Pridmore (2000) as a major contributor to the improvement of children's participation in the school context.

## **6.4. Element 2: Non-discrimination in the access to participation**

### **6.4.1. Background results and analysis**

This section of the indicator set tries to determine whether this school's context favours equality of opportunities and non-discrimination in the access to participation. Three forms of potential discrimination in the access to participation are analysed: discrimination on the basis of academic status; discrimination on the basis of age; and discrimination on the basis of being designated as having SEN.

The overall results related to this section (table 6.5) show a rather negative picture, as over 50% of the indicators deviate from a non-discriminatory stance. It would, then, appear that the school does not provide a discrimination-free background. There are, however, certain differences between the results concerning each of the personal characteristics.



Table 6.5: School level background results for Element 2 of the indicator set  
(Non-discrimination in the access to participation)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
BD20	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers refer to non-discrimination in access to participation as a principle?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BD21	Children's perceptions	Do children portray everybody participating in the classroom and not only the 'good' pupils?	Interviews	Yes (19/32 children's answers = 59.4%)
BD24	Parents' perceptions	Do parents attribute similar participation rights to younger and older children?	Questionnaires	No Parents' answers average years 1 and 2 = 15.3% Parents' answers average years 3 and 4 = 19.7%
BD25	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray children designated as having SEN as capable of participation in the classroom in similar terms to those of other children?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BD26	Teachers' perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as being fully part of the class?	Interviews	Yes (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BD27	Children's perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as being fully part of the class?	Interviews	Yes (20/32 children's answers = 62.5%)
BD28	Teachers' perceptions	Is the support teacher portrayed as non-exclusive for the children designated as having SEN?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BD29	Children's perceptions	Is the support teacher portrayed as non-exclusive for the children designated as having SEN?	Interviews	No (14/20 children's answers = 70% of the valid cases)
BD30	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers state that children designated as having SEN should do the same work / work on the same subject as the rest of the class?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BD31	Children's perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as doing the same work / working on the same subject as the rest of the class?	Interviews	No (16/20 children's answers = 80% of the valid cases)
BD32 A (SEN) B (NO SEN)	Children's perceptions	Do children designated as having SEN have a perception of their participation similar to that of children designated as 'normal'?	Questionnaires	SEN average = 2.61 NO SEN average = 2.58

When academic status is considered, perceptions diverge substantially between children and teachers: children demonstrate a more equitable perception (BD21, 59.4% positive answers) than teachers, who tend to favour the students with a higher academic status (BD20, 62.5% negative answers). This issue will be further developed in the section concerning the event-related indicators (section 6.4.2.), as these appear to demonstrate that the teachers' expressed attitude is also transposed into their practice.

In what refers to the assessment of the importance of age as a potential basis for discrimination, only the parents' perceptions were collected (BD24) at this point,

because the topic will be debated in depth in chapters 7 and 8. Still, it can be affirmed that the parental response is very much in line with the body of literature that suggests a certain discrimination in the attribution of participation rights on the basis of children's age (Lowy, 1992).

In what concerns the main focus of this section – i.e. the attitudes towards children designated as having SEN and the perceptions regarding their access to participation – it can be said that although the children designated as having SEN demonstrate a perception of their participation which is slightly more positive than that of their peers designated as 'normal' (BD32, SEN average = 2.61; No SEN average = 2.58), both teachers and the majority of children present negative perceptions (e.g. BD28 to BD31). The only exception to that tendency resides in the fact that both groups perceive children designated as having SEN as being fully part of the class (BD26, BD27, 62.5% positive results). However, being seen as part of the class would only be a first and very limited stage in the access to participation for children designated as having SEN: if they are not seen as capable (BD25), but as always having to do different work (BD30, BD31) and as always in need of a different teacher (BD28, BD29), their access to the main forum of participation could be, to say the least, seriously compromised (Hallam, Ireson, Lister, Chaudhury & Davies, 2003). Perhaps, this would not be so worrying if the children designated as having SEN, while not participating in the general classroom's activities, were developing enriched differentiated programmes with high levels of individual participation. Were that the case, it could be said that the results were related with the approach taken towards SEN education in this specific school. However, it is believed that such an explanation does not apply in the specific circumstances of this school and that children designated as having SEN were, indeed, being discriminated against in their participation opportunities.



Chapter 7 will provide concrete examples to corroborate this affirmation. It is also believed that these mitigated attitudes are confirmed in the practice by the event-related results. In order to examine that aspect in detail the event-related indicators will now be considered.

#### **6.4.2. Event-related results and analysis**

The results (table 6.6) seem, in fact, to indicate a generally poor performance of the school in enabling equal access to participation for all children: in 50% of the classrooms the activity was not accessible to every child (D16), the primary reason for that being the physical separation of groups of children from the rest of the class. Furthermore, in the majority of cases (D17, 62.5%) no measures were taken to ensure that, when an activity by its nature was not accessible to everybody, mechanisms would be put in place to guarantee such access.

There seems to be a problem as well in the variability of children participating in the classroom activities, as most of the interactions – both child- and teacher-initiated – appear to be monopolised by a small group of children, instead of being taken up in a fairly equitable fashion by the whole class. A good example of this situation is that presented by the indicators regarding the percentage of children who account for at least 50% of the interactions observed, either child- or teacher-initiated (D18B, D19B).

Were there a non-discriminative situation, it would be legitimate to expect that those values would also be approximately 50%. However, in both cases, i.e. in both child- and teacher-initiated interactions, the value is situated around 20%. This tends to confirm a lack of parity in the accessibility of participation as one fifth of the pupils occupy

almost half of the interactions.

Table 6.6: School level event-related results for Element 2 of the indicator set  
(Non-discrimination in the access to participation)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
D16	Observable	Is the activity, by its nature, accessible to all children?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: observation schedules	50 –50 classrooms
D17	Observable	Are provisions taken to insure non-discrimination?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: observation schedules	No (5/8 classrooms = 62.5%)
D18 A (SEN) B (%50%) C (+ participative child)	Observable	Do all children have a similar level of participation in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	No  A: School average of interactions initiated by children designated as having SEN = 5.5% (global average = 4.3%)  B: School average of children accounting for at least 50% of the child-initiated interactions in the classroom = 4.5 (21.5%)  C: School average of interactions initiated by the most participative child = 20.6% (in 5/8, i.e. 62.5%, classrooms this child is the best pupil)
D19 A (SEN) B (%50%) C (+ participative child)	Observable	Do teachers vary equitably whom they interact with?	Classroom: observation schedules	No  A: School average of teacher-initiated interactions directed at children designated as having SEN = 6.9% (global average = 4.3%)  B: School average of children accounting for at least 50% of the teacher-initiated interactions in the classroom = 4.89 (23.3%)  C: School average of teacher-initiated interactions directed at the most participative child = 16.4% (in 5/8, i.e. 62.5%, classrooms this child is one of the best pupils)
D21	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN have the same seating arrangements as the rest of the class / group?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Yes (6/8 classrooms = 75%)
D22	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN remain in the classroom / with the rest of the group at all times?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Yes (5/8 classrooms = 62.5%)
D23	Observable	Do the support teachers work with children, other than those designated as having SEN?	Classroom: informal observation notes + observation schedules	No (5/8 classrooms = 62.5%)
D24	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN do the same work / work on the same subject as the rest of the class / group?	Classroom: informal observation notes + observation schedules	50-50 classrooms

This notion is further corroborated by the fact that the most participative child in each



class – i.e. the child who initiates and/ or is the object of the most interactions – is responsible, on his/ her own, for an average 20.6% (D18C) of all the child-initiated interactions and 16.4% of all the teacher-initiated interactions (D19C). This is all the more indicative of an unbalanced situation as the equitable percentage of interactions taken up by any individual child, depending on the number of children in the classroom, should be situated between 4.2% and 6.3%. Moreover, in both circumstances, and in the majority of the classes (62.5%), the child in question is either the best pupil or one of the best pupils – as defined by the teacher – which tends to confirm the results from the background indicators pointing to a discrimination in favour of pupils with higher academic status.

In what concerns children designated as having SEN, their situation is apparently more favourable with regards to the activities observed, than what the background information would lead to believe: in both child- and teacher-initiated interactions their average result is slightly above the class' average (D18A, D19A). Additionally, in the majority of classes, these children remain in the classroom at all times and have the same seating arrangements as the rest of the class (D21, D22). However, when a finer measure of the quality of that participation is taken, a discriminatory situation emerges because, in most classes, children designated as having SEN are not only doing a different work and subject from the rest of the class (D24) but are also being taught exclusively by the support teacher (D23), a situation that, once again, might hinder their access to their classes' main forum of participation.

In summary, then, both the background and the event-related results seem to indicate certain difficulties at this level, with regards to the promotion of the equality of opportunities and the non-discrimination in the access to participation. The situation

that appears to be present in the school is one in which pupils with higher academic status are not only favoured by the attitudes of most teachers but do, in fact, occupy a much larger portion of the interactions in class than their peers.

When it comes to children designated as having SEN, it would be fair to say that much work remains to be done in improving access to their classes' main forum of participation. This could start by the actual physical access – e.g. not having different seating arrangements – and particularly by an investment in improving the quality of their participation. This issue will, therefore, be further debated in chapter 7.

### **6.5. Element 3: Non-traditional conception of children and childhood**

#### **6.5.1. Background results and analysis**

Once again, the school as a whole does not score particularly well in this element, for almost 60% of the background indicators point to a less participation-oriented panorama (table 6.7), i.e. they purport a more traditional and patronising view of children and childhood than that of the parameters established by the 'inalienable right' view. In fact, this is the element where the school demonstrates the poorest results of all.



**Table 6.7: School level background results for Element 3 of the indicator set  
(Non-traditional conception of children and childhood)**

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
BN33	Documentary	Do the expectations regarding children in the school's educational project coincide with a non-traditional conception of children and childhood?	School's educational project	Yes – always referred to as 'children'; mentions as goals: 'help the children to: strengthen self-esteem, facilitate the creation of a sense of belonging to a healthy group; stimulate the creation of strong, stable and tolerant affective relationships'
BN35	Teachers' perceptions	Are children portrayed beyond their role as pupils?	Interviews	Yes (6/8 teachers' answers = 75%)
BN34	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general described in positive terms?	Interviews	No (6/8 teachers' answers = 75%)
BN36	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general described as competent / capable?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BN37	Children's perceptions	Do children describe pupils as competent / capable?	Interviews	Yes (27/32 children's answers = 84.3%)
BN38	Children's perceptions	Do children purport teachers' opinion about pupils as competent / capable subjects?	Interviews	Yes (17/32 children's answers = 53.1%)
BN51	Teachers' perceptions	Is autonomy referred to as a value?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BN52	Observable	Are children given meaningful 'responsibilities'?	Classroom: informal observation notes	No (6/8 classrooms = 75%)
BN39	Teachers' perceptions	Are children portrayed as subjects of rights?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BN40	Documentary	Are children awarded primarily rights?	School's educational plan	No – all formulations are spelled out in terms of what is demanded from pupils and this only in academic subjects.
BN41	Teachers' perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BN42	Parents' perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	Questionnaires	No School total of parents' answers portraying: Rights = 1185 (49.9%) Duties = 1190 (50.1%)
BN43	Children's perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	Interviews	Yes (13/20 children's answers = 65% of the valid cases)
BN50 A (N-T) B (T)	Parents' perceptions	Do parents refer more to 'non-traditional' rights than traditional ones?	Questionnaires	No School total of parents' answers portraying 'non-traditional' rights: 35% School total of parents' answers portraying traditional rights: 46%
BN44	Teachers' perceptions	Are children awarded attitudinal respect?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BN45 A (R) B (D)	Parents' perceptions	Are children awarded attitudinal respect?	Questionnaires	No School total of parents' answers portraying: Respect referred to as a right: 9.1% Respect referred to as a duty: 25.6%
BN49	Children's perceptions	Do children portray as unfair / incorrect for the teacher to tell pupils off?	Interviews	Yes (23/32 children's answers = 71.9%)
BN46	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray their relationship with the children as non-hierarchical?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BN47	Parents' perceptions	Do parents portray their relationship with the children as non-hierarchical?	Questionnaires	No (School total of parents' answers portraying a hierarchical relationship = 57.7%)
BN48	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils- teachers relationships as non-hierarchical?	Interviews	No (22/32 children's answers = 68.6%)
BN53	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers conceive learning mostly as fun?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BN54	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general portrayed as enjoying school?	Interviews	No (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)

The most salient aspect characterising the general results at this level (table 6.7) seems to be the opposition between adults – parents and teachers – and children with regards to the two most important issues assessed by this section: the perceptions concerning the rights awarded to children, on the one hand; and the competence and capacities to exercise them, on the other hand. In fact, neither teachers (BN41, 62.5% negative results) nor parents (BN42) award primarily rights to children – as do the children (BN43, 65% positive answers) – or portray them as subjects of their own rights (BN39). Moreover, the value of ‘respect’ is portrayed much more as a duty children owe to adults, than as something children are also entitled to in their relationships with adults (BN44, BN45). This attitude is particularly evident in the case of parental perceptions (e.g. BN45, respect as a duty = 25.6% whereas respect as a right = 9.1%).

These elements contribute to the portrait of a rigid hierarchy in adult-children relationships which is, indeed, drawn by all the groups of participants (BN46 to BN48). Teachers, in particular, seem to characterise the relationships not only as highly hierarchical but also as somewhat condescending or patronising, for, in the majority of cases, children are described neither in positive terms (BN34, 75% negative answers), nor as competent (BN36, 50% negative answers) nor are they given meaningful responsibilities in class (BN52, 75% negative answers). Furthermore, the event-related results seem to confirm that this kind of attitude is also reflected in the functioning of the school. This can be appreciated in the following section.

### **6.5.2. Event-related results and analysis**

The portrait of the school’s performance does not appear to improve when events are observed through the lenses of these indicators (table 6.8).



Table 6.8: School level event-related results for Element 3 of the indicator set  
(Non-traditional conception of children and childhood)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
N25	Observable	Are children given meaningful 'responsibilities' within the activity?	Classroom: informal observation notes	No (6/8 classrooms = 75%)
N26 A (positive) B (negative)	Observable	Is the incidence of positive encouragement higher than that of negative remarks?	Classroom: observation schedules	No (6/8 classrooms = 75%) School average of positive encouragement: 3.3% School average of negative remarks: 6.5%
N27	Observable	Are children enabled and encouraged to contribute their views on relevant matters?	Classroom: observation schedules	50 – 50 classrooms
N28	Observable	Do the teachers use children's common knowledge when developing the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	50 – 50 classrooms
N29 A p,n (420) B p,n (920) C p,n (1720) D p,n (total)	Observable	Do teachers act upon suggestions of the children?	Classroom: observation schedules	Yes  A: School average 420 (management expression) positive response = 4.5% School average 420 (management expression) negative response = 8%  B: School average 920 (behaviour expression) positive response = 1.2% School average 920 (behaviour expression) negative response = 5.2%  C: School average 1720 (curriculum expression) positive response = 47.5% School average 1720 (curriculum expression) negative response = 33.7%  D: School average total positive response = 53.2% School average total negative response = 46.8%
N30	Observable	Does humour have an incidence in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	No School average of humour incidence in classroom interactions: 0.9%

They seem to confirm a situation where children are not seen as capable subjects as, in 75% of the activities observed, they are not given meaningful responsibilities (N25). This can be taken as a possible indication of the above-mentioned attitude to the effect that not much trust is put on their abilities to carry out such tasks.

In the same proportion (75% of the classes) children are not receiving an approving judgement of their current performance – which would have represented a favourable view on the children's abilities – for the amount of negative remarks almost doubles that of positive encouragement (N26, negative remarks = 6.5% while positive

encouragement = 3.3%). It should also be noted that, with regards to their behavioural performance, on no occasion whatsoever, in any class, throughout all the lessons observed, were the children ever praised or complimented. This was indeed the only category of the observation schedule to present a 0 value all over, as the totality of comments regarding behaviour was of a negative valence. Furthermore, even when encouragement in other areas is present, in 50% of the classes it is mostly characterised as generalised / non-specific (N27), i.e. not of the type that would value the child's specific performance or would seem to enable and encourage them to contribute their views on relevant matters. Without the intention of being categorical, the supposition can nevertheless be advanced that this type of interaction, in addition to being indicative of a more traditional view, might also not produce the best impact on the children's motivation and self-esteem (Hester et al., 2003).

Finally, it was also decided to examine an aspect that is believed to be connected with the non-traditional view – and especially with the environment within the classroom – but was not present in the literature. This aspect is the presence and the use of humour in the classroom. Humour was therefore included in this section of the indicator set and the school was assessed in that aspect as well. The results obtained indicate a very low incidence of humour in the activities observed (N30, humour = 0.9% of interactions), which is also in line with the information gathered by the background indicators (BN53, BN54, table 6.7) to the effect that teaching and learning are taken very seriously... in all senses of the term.

Still, one positive aspect in this section is that the majority of teachers *do* take up children's suggestions in a positive manner when they express them, at least in what concerns the curriculum (N29C). However, the response to suggestions on class



management and on behaviour is predominantly negative (N29A and B). Moreover, 50% of teachers do not use children's common knowledge to develop the activity being undertaken (N28) which seems to indicate that, even when suggestions are taken, they are either not extended to the fullest of their possibilities or that this does not happen in all the classes.

In fact, qualitative material appears to indicate that the same thing happens at the school's level in this particular aspect of the staff's reaction to children's suggestions. The example described below constitutes, then, a contribution to the assessment of the school's performance as a non-traditional or traditional ethos.

The event in question was first brought up by the head on 26/01/00. It concerned the instance in which, in one of the classes – Laura's class, year 4 – some children manifested their disagreement with the fact that teachers smoked inside the school building. Alice, the head – and a smoker herself – described it to the researcher as follows:

'Oh, personally I think the children have the right to say [interrupts]... Even yesterday I went into Laura's class and they [the children] told me: 'Alice, you know something? I think you [the teachers] should not smoke in the teachers' lounge'... And I said: 'You know, I think you're absolutely right'... [And they said] 'Oh, what can we do so that... how can you stop smoking?'... And I said: 'Well, here's what you'll do... You don't agree with the fact that we smoke inside the school, isn't it? So, you'll have to write a LETTER... but it must be a proper letter [laughter]... You'll write a letter to the School Council'... [interrupts] 'The School Council?!' – they said, *because they don't know what it is*... – And I said: 'Yes, the School Council, which is a meeting that the teachers hold every month... So, you'll write a letter saying that you don't agree with the fact that we smoke in the teachers' lounge... And you have my support... I agree with you...

But, then, where do you suggest we go smoke?' – *I said, just to see what they'd come up with* – 'Outside, Alice, you'd have to smoke outside!' [laughter]...

And I said: 'But can you imagine me, the head of the school, OUTSIDE, with a cigarette on my hand... and all the teachers smoking at the school's doors?.. *Do you think that would be appropriate?*'... 'Well – they said – that's the way it has to be'...

'Well, all right, then. You'll write the letter for me; you'll all sign it; I'll take it to the School Council to read it and show it to the teachers *and then we'll see what the teachers will say*'.

Because I believe they [the children] have the right to say this kind of things... After all, they spend a lot of their time here, they have... the right to say what they think or don't think [...]. Because they do have an opinion and they know what they want. Therefore I like very much to respect their... [interrupts]... whenever possible, in what regards the school's functioning, if... if they have a suggestion, it will be, as far as possible, responded to...'

(Alice's interview on 26/01/00, emphasis added)

There are several aspects of this excerpt worth analysing, especially in what concerns the participants' attitudes. In fact, not only is this account relevant with respect to the section on 'non-traditional conception of children and childhood', but it can also be considered as exemplifying a 'powersharing' issue, thus allowing, simultaneously, to examine the head's attitudes with regards to that issue:

As a whole, the head's position could be described as demonstrating an 'evident openness to listen and an apparent willingness to act'; i.e. when faced with a 'complaint' from the children, the head listens and does not reject it, volunteering a solution that is based upon the children's participation and her own declared commitment. This is, in appearance, a favourable reaction.

There are, however, some elements of the head's account that are indicative of a less



positive inclination. One of those elements is the perspective in which the head tells the children she will present their letter in the school council; i.e. 'we'll see what the teachers will say'. This can be taken to imply that the power of decision would lie solely and ultimately with the teachers. Additionally, it seems relevant to draw attention to the fact that the head admits to the researcher that the children – and these were year 4 children, i.e. those that had spent at least four years in the school – do not even know what the school council is, which provides further indication of their non-participation at any level of the school's functioning bodies.

There are also marks of a certain patronising discourse, which is not in line with a non-traditional view, when the head states that she solicited the children's opinion, not genuinely in search of solutions, but 'just to see what they'd come up with'. Moreover, while stating an apparent support to the children's idea, the head collaterally demonstrates having no real intention of changing the *status quo* for, in her view, it would not be 'appropriate' for the teachers to smoke outside the school.

In fact, the course of events that followed this episode corroborates the interpretation above: the class and their teacher – a 'militant' non-smoker – did write such letter, which was handed in to the head as it had been convened (on 28/01/00). It was then left on the table of the staff room for two days. During that period, the class' teacher, Laura, occasionally called the other teachers' attention to it during the breaks, which occasioned some conversations on the issue. The non-smoking teachers generally made comments to the effect that the children 'had a good point'. However, at a given moment, Ruth, one of the smoking teachers, volunteered a 'so, where do you want us to go smoke?' and conversation died there. Two days after, the letter was out of sight.

The minutes regarding the February's school council (01/02/00) demonstrate that the issue was not part of the meeting's agenda. The researcher's field-notes also indicate that it was not brought up by the head for discussion, as it had been promised to the children, neither in that meeting nor in any of the following school council meetings.

In fact, this remained an unresolved issue for the children in that class until the end of the school year, to the point that it emerged spontaneously in the conversation when they were interviewed in June:

[when asked about improvements that could be made to the school's functioning]

*Carla* The teachers should also stop smoking... at least here in school.

*Monica* Right, especially teacher Alice.

*Jorge* Yeah, teacher Alice and the others too.

(...)

[when asked about children's rights]

*Carla* The pupils have the right to not being hit by the teachers' smoke.

*Samuel* Not being hit by smoke;... and eating food which...

*Jorge* Is ideal!

*Samuel* I think it [smoking] should be forbidden!

*Carla* Oh, right, but there are many things that are forbidden and people still do them...

*Jorge* Like smoking.

*Carla* Right, it is forbidden to smoke in the school and people still smoke.

(...)

*Carla* Sometimes, Mrs. S. and the other 'employecs' [playtime attendants], they smoke in the playground.

*Samuel* And in the playground... we smell that smoke and it's as if we're also smoking ourselves.

*Monica* And I've seen Mrs. F. [the cook] smoke over the food.

*Carla* It should be forbidden to smoke inside the school, that's all.



- Monica* Yes, they should only smoke outside the school... Mrs. S., she smokes... and that's none of our business, right?
- Jorge* Right.
- Monica* It's none of our business: a person smokes because they want to, but Mrs. S. [a playtime attendant], she does the right thing because she goes OUTSIDE the school to smoke.
- Carla* And the teachers... the teachers smoke INSIDE the school...
- Samuel* If I were the Head I'd forbid people smoking...
- Monica* Yeah, but our school's head [teacher Alice]...
- Jorge* She smokes herself!
- Monica* And on top of it, she smokes in the teachers' lounge... and she shouldn't smoke inside.

(Laura's class' group, year 4, on 06/06/00)

To summarise the situation, although the teachers' position – from a rational and health-related point of view – was hardly defensible, due to their inherent power status, it prevailed over the children's suggestion, which was not even seriously considered or discussed as it had been promised by the head. This can be easily linked with a more traditional view on children, one that patronises them (Mayall, 2000) while not really taking them seriously (Freeman, 1992b). The traditional hierarchy between adults' and children's status (Pridmore, 2000) is never put in question either. Moreover, the head's stated commitment towards the children without a real engagement to act, reflects an incoherence between discourse and practice which is a good example of the concept of an 'apparent participation' (Wood, 1998). As a consequence, the pupils may acquire a sense of frustration and powerlessness, which is reflected in their interview above, leading on to disillusion and coyness to spell out their concerns (Alderson, 1999).

As a final comment to this section, it is interesting to acknowledge the presence of a possible social reproduction phenomenon: in fact, the school's performance in this

domain seems to fit with the traditional and hierarchical conception of adult-child relationships and of children’s place in social life that had been considered as predominant in Portuguese society, in Portugal’s report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (1997).

## 6.6. Element 4: Participation being beneficial for children

### 6.6.1. Background results

Table 6.9: School level background results for Element 4 of the indicator set  
(Participation being beneficial for children)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School’s results
BP55	Teachers’ perceptions	Is participation perceived as a good educational tool?	Interviews	Yes (7/8 teachers’ answers = 87.5%)
BP56	Teachers’ perceptions	Do teachers consider that there are specific benefits for children deriving from participation?	Interviews	Yes (7/8 teachers’ answers = 87.5%)
BP57	Children’s perceptions	Is one’s perception of participation co-related with one’s perception of other skills?	Questionnaires	No Correlation of average participation and academic self-perception (.34, $p < 0.001$ )
BP59	Children’s perceptions	Do children demonstrate skills associated with participation? a) being able to identify realistic problems.	Interviews	Yes (31/32= 96.9%)
BP60	Children’s perceptions	Do children demonstrate skills associated with participation? b) problem-solving / being able to propose realistic solutions?	Interviews	Yes (23/32= 71.9%)

As mentioned in chapter 5, this element was the least explored of the study as it would not be appropriate to propose the existence of causal relations in this domain. Therefore, the assessment of possible links between children’s level of participation was performed solely through the use of correlation techniques and with great reservation. Even with the use of such techniques, the results shown in table 6.9 not totally conclusive (BP57, correlation = 0.34,  $p < 0.001$ ): although highly significant, the positive correlation between the level of participation and academic self-perception is not very strong. It demonstrates, nonetheless, a certain tendency for an association between participation



and academic status that appears to corroborate the results presented in section 6.4.2.

Still, there are some interesting aspects to be discussed, from an ideological point of view, on the issue of the possible benefits of participation for children. The first aspect relates to adults' attitudes. In this particular case, teachers' attitudes and beliefs are almost unanimously positive (87.5%). However, a social desirability factor must not be discarded as an explanation for such results (BP55, BP56, table 6.9).

An interesting point, to illustrate that adults' attitudes demonstrating a low level of confidence in the children's abilities (table 6.7) have little foundation, is that virtually 100% of children are able to identify realistic problems concerning the school and its functioning (BP59). This seems to confirm the strength of the 'pragmatic' argument which is used as a rationale for child participation (Armstrong, 2003; Lansdown, 2001): they are in possession of information which is not available to the teachers and that could contribute to the improvement of the school (Gersch, 1987). That number drops to 71.9%, however, when it comes to the children being able to propose realistic solutions (BP60). Such a result leads, therefore, to the proposition that the latter would constitute a more advanced stage in the development of skills associated with participation. Hence, it will be interesting to observe in chapters 7 and 8 whether there is an 'age' effect related with this aspect.

## **6.7. Element 5: Development of democracy and citizenship**

### **6.7.1. Background results and analysis**

As it can be appreciated in table 6.10, the 'official' discourse with regards to democracy and citizenship is quite positive (BDC62; BDC63).

Table 6.10: School level background results for Element 5 of the indicator set  
(Development of democracy and citizenship)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
BDC62	Documentary	Is the curriculum based upon participation / democracy / citizenship principles?	School's educational project + curriculum	Yes 'this school wants to instil in our children democratic values, such as participation, responsibility, the respect for the rights and opinions of others, while developing co-operation, independence and solidarity'
BDC63	Head's perceptions	Does the head refer to democracy and citizenship as personal concerns?	Interview	Yes 'we wrote this because we believe in this: that to be a citizen one needs to act, I think one needs to believe, to enjoy it. To enjoy it, one needs to understand and to understand one needs to know... and therefore: educating, forming citizens is our role'
BDC64	Children's perceptions	Do children portray the head as having democracy and citizenship as personal concerns?	Interviews	No (23/32 children's answers = 71.9%)
BDC65	Children's perceptions	Do children portray a democratically run school?	Interviews	No (17/32 children's answers = 53.1%)
BDC66	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers refer to democracy and citizenship as personal concerns?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BDC78	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers envision the school as adequate to children's needs / as a locus of social intervention?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BDC79	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers consider themselves as transmitters of values?	Interviews	Yes (5/8 teachers' answers = 62.5%)
BDC68	Teachers' perceptions	Are democracy / rights seen as values to be taught?	Interviews	Yes (6/8 teachers' answers = 75%)
BDC69	Teachers' perceptions	Are democracy / rights seen as values to be lived?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BDC67	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers perceive children as capable of undertaking democratic procedures?	Interviews	Yes (6/8 teachers' answers = 75%)
BDC70	Teachers' perceptions	Are children considered as citizens in the present?	Interviews	No (7/8 teachers' answers = 87.5%)
BDC71	Observable + documentary	Are there democratic processes in which children take part?	School: informal observation notes;	No for school in general
BDC72	Observable	Are there democratic structures in which children take part?	School: informal observation notes;	No for school in general
BDC73	Observable	Are there consultation exercises near the students?	School: informal observation notes;	No for school in general
BDC74	Observable	Are there channels of bottom-up communication?	School: informal observation notes;	No for school in general
BDC75	Children's perceptions	Do children propose democratic solutions for decision making?	Interviews	Yes (18/32 children's answers = 56.3%)
BDC76	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils as taking part in democratic processes?	Interviews	No (17/32 children's answers = 53.1%)
BDC77	Children's perceptions	Do children demonstrate knowledge of 'Convention-like' rights?	Interviews	Yes (11/20 children's answers = 55% of the valid cases)

Furthermore, many teachers state a belief in democratic and citizenship values (BDC66,



50% of teachers' answers) and perceive themselves as having a potentially active role in passing those values on to the children (BDC78, 50% of teachers' answers and BDC79, 62.5% of teachers' answers).

For the first time as well, children are perceived by most teachers (75%) as capable of undertaking democratic procedures (BDC67). This may imply that more trust is put in their abilities in this domain than in previous ones, which would mark an improvement with regards to the results of element 3 (non-traditional conception).

These are all positive points but it should not be forgotten that they remain at the level of intentions and attitudes. In fact, a nuance needs to be introduced when analysing the results on teachers' perceptions: while the majority (75%) views democracy as a value worthy of being *taught* (BDC68), only half of the teachers consider it as a value to be *lived* by children in their everyday school-life (BDC69). This seems to be, indeed, the cornerstone of their discourse and action in this domain. These results are not surprising if combined with the fact that children are perceived much more as 'citizens-in-the-making' than as 'citizens-in-the-present' (BDC70, 87.5% negative answers), with the inherent conception towards the exercise of democratic rights being postponed to adulthood (Alderson, 1999; Hodgson, 1996).

Curiously, the children themselves demonstrate not only the willingness but an evident potential ability (BDC75, BDC77) to participate in democratic fora, which is manifested both through this section's indicators and through previous ones. In spite of that, they portray a realistic and lucid picture of their current situation in the school (BDC64, BDC65, BDC76) as there are effectively no real democratic processes, structures, exercises and/ or procedures in which the children take part at the school

level (BDC71 to BDC74). An episode analysed in the following section should provide further insight into this issue.

6.7.2. Event-related results and analysis

Table 6.11: School level event-related results for Element 5 of the indicator set (Development of democracy and citizenship)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
DC33	Observable	Is there explicit teaching and learning about democratic processes and citizenship?	Classroom: observation schedules	No (6/8 classrooms = 75%)
DC34	Observable	When children are chosen to participate in the activity, is representativeness an issue?	Classroom: informal observation notes	50 - 50 classrooms
DC35	Observable	Are roles clearly distributed and discussed?	Classroom: observation schedules	No (5/8 classrooms = 62.5%)
DC36	Observable	Are children allowed non-participation if they wish?	Classroom: informal observation notes	No (8/8 classrooms = 100%)

Being mostly a contextual section, few event-related results are presented here (table 6.11). Still, the same trend is noticeable when the actual lessons observed are analysed: democratic and citizenship approaches do not seem to be intrinsic to the majority of the activities in the school (DC33, DC36). It should be noticed, however, that these results refer to the school level itself: the great variability at the classroom level (e.g. DC34, DC35) demonstrates that not all members of staff shared the same practice in this domain. This aspect will, thus, be further developed in chapter 7.

To finalise this section, an example can be given to illustrate the approach taken in Santa Maria to a specific situation in which a limited role was attributed to children. As will be seen, this was not satisfactorily perceived by all the teachers, some of which recognised that the event in question could have counted with the children's democratic participation:



At Mardi Gras, there was traditionally a big costume parade organised by the Town Hall, which involved all the primary schools in the city. For the schools, a big part of the Mardi Gras project consisted in the design, the selection and the sewing of the costumes to be worn by the children (and some of the teachers too...). Being presented as a pedagogical activity, it would be legitimate to expect children to participate in these various activities.

However, as will be seen ahead, in Santa Maria's school the costumes were designed by one of the teachers; they were afterwards sewn by the parents and teachers and were simply worn by the children on the day of the parade. The children's role in this example would, therefore, seem to fit the 'decoration' level in Hart's ladder model (Hart, 1992), i.e. still a level of non-participation. Had there been a more democratic and participation-oriented ethos, children could have, in one way or the other, participated in all of the stages of the project: decision-making, design, selection, sewing... Instead, the school council minutes regarding this issue indicate very clearly that all those stages were accomplished either by the teachers or the parents:

'The proposals for the Mardi Gras costume were put up for voting and the costume designed by teacher Julia was chosen. A prototype of the costume will be done, and that prototype will be sewn in order to be shown to the pupils' parents, so that they'll know how to sew it'

(School council minutes, 04/02/2000).

As it can be appreciated, no mention is made of the children and no role is attributed to them. Coincidentally, this establishes the importance of not taking documentary evidence at face value (Duffy, 1999), as there can be an interrogation on whether, even between the teachers, a real democratic exercise took place. In fact, in an interview prior

to the meeting where the costume design was supposedly voted, Alice had fortuitously mentioned that the choice had already been made beforehand:

*Leonor*     What about the Mardi Gras costumes?

*Alice*       Well, the costume will be the one designed by Julia... we already have a model.

(Alice's interview on 26/01/00)

Therefore, the situation of the school in general with regards to this aspect could not be classified as being guided by participation and democracy principles. Some of the teachers were indeed concerned by that fact. Perhaps one of the most interesting comments expressing concerns about the children's lack of participation in the Mardi Gras project was that put forward by Ruth (year 1 teacher):

'About the Mardi Gras... I don't think there is much to say about this Mardi Gras thing, Leonor... because the Mardi Gras was a project of the school. *And it was a project of the school in which the children did not have much participation...* because there were other years in which the projects were elaborated by the pupils, by the kids.

The projects that were assessed and discussed in the school council were those that the kids had devised in the classrooms. And then the teachers would vote... on the different kids' projects... and that was a beautiful thing (...). But not this year! *This year, there was a project of the teachers, which was imposed on the kids...* And then... I can't seem to get to terms with that [laughter]... because they're always asking me: 'Ruth, what will we be disguised as?'... and I try to answer the best I can, but I'm not really sure myself. It doesn't make sense to me... and that's why I say that *when things come from the outside... they don't make much sense for the kids either...*

Because, in the end, what will their role be? *They'll just be PARADING the costumes that someone else conceived and that their mothers are sewing...*

So, you know what Francisca [support teacher] and I did in our classroom, so that they could participate a little bit more?... they're making paper flowers!... [the design of the



costume included sewn paper flowers]. Of course, it's only a year 1 class and the flowers are quite difficult to make, for some of them, so they're quite submerged in papers and all [laughter]... But, too bad for the aesthetics... they'll be wearing the flowers they made THEMSELVES... and in the end, in the midst of all those flowers no one will notice if some are a little bit more wrinkled, and all that...

But the important thing is that there IS participation... and they can also take the flowers home to show to their parents that they are already ABLE to do that kind of paper flowers (...) and this is our way to try to give them a little more motivation... *because when they do the projects themselves... you don't need any of this: the involvement is already there; the motivation is already there'...*

(Ruth's interview on 21/02/00, emphasis added)

Finally, it is interesting to focus on the comments made in the school council meeting which immediately followed the actual Mardi Gras parade day, in order to observe how the event was registered and assessed by the majority of the school. Once again, the most striking feature is the lack of reference to the children:

'The Mardi Gras project was evaluated and all the teachers present in the meeting have manifested the following opinion: *all the teachers* that had engaged themselves to participate in the Mardi Gras parade have done so, with commitment and a lot of work. *The parents' co-operation*, both financially and through handwork was, in general, of the best kind'.

(School council minutes on 14/3/2000, emphasis added)

This type of approach is also an example of a very traditional perception of children and of their place and role in society and school, as well as their developmental capability, which was discussed in section 6.5. of this chapter. It is perhaps nothing more than the reflection of the preponderant mentality on these issues, as proposed in Portugal's report (1997). In fact, no statutory measures at all, at the national level, promote the

participation of primary school children in any democratic fora, even if such legislation does exist for secondary schools:

‘Where school life is concerned, the provisions of decree laws Nos. 769-A/76 (...) and 172/91 (...) are increasingly applied with regard to student participation in educational bodies and structures. The decrees, which relate to the democratic management of primary and secondary school establishments, provide for student representation on school councils and class councils, *although it is restricted to pupils in the third cycle of secondary education*’ (Portuguese report to the CRC, 1997, p.41, see reference in appendix 1).

## **6.8. Element 6: Participation as a powersharing issue**

### **6.8.1. Background results and analysis**

This section is closely related to the previous one. In fact, the current background indicators are mainly concentrated in asserting whether there are structures and procedures which enable the occurrence of power-sharing between adults and children. As it can be appreciated in table 6.12, this is another section where the school’s results are quite poor, as there are more than 55% negatively oriented indicators in general and some indicators (BPW80 to BPW84) portray even exclusively negative results. This is also in line with the results obtained in sections 6.5 and 6.7.

In what refers to power-sharing, not only in structures and procedures, but also regarding adult-children relationships, the school’s performance seems to be characterised by mixed results, this being one of the sections in which between-class discrepancies are most discernible (e.g. BPW88, BPW90, BPW92).



The majority of children portray a more positive perception of such relationships by recognising teachers as providing pupils with choices (BPW94, 56.3% positive answers) as well as portraying pupils as having, to a certain extent, an influence upon the organisation and content of teaching (BPW61, 53.1% positive answers).

Table 6.12: School level background results for Element 6 of the indicator set  
(Participation as a powersharing issue)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
BPW 80	Documentary	Are there indications of children taking part in decision-making structures?	School council's minutes	No
BPW 81	Observable	Are children part of the school's decision-making structures?	School: informal observation notes;	No
BPW 82	Observable	Are there processes in which children have the same power as adults?	School: informal observation notes;	No for school in general
BPW 83	Observable	Are children informed about the programme?	School: informal observation notes;	No for school in general
BPW 84	Observable	Are there work programmes / plans (individual/ collective) defined by the pupils?	Classroom: informal observation notes	No (6/8 classrooms = 75%)
BPW 97	Documentary + teachers' perceptions	Do parents of children designated as having SEN participate in their assessment procedure?	School Council's minutes + Interviews	No
BPW 98	Documentary + teachers' perceptions	Do children designated as having SEN participate in their assessment procedure?	School Council's minutes + Interviews	No
BPW 85	Observable	Do children treat the head in an informal way?	School: informal observation notes	No (6/8 classrooms = 75%)
BPW 86	Observable	Do children treat the teacher in an informal way?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Yes (5/8 classrooms = 62.5%)
BPW 87	Head's perceptions	Does the head express a positive view on being criticised by the pupils?	Interview + informal conversation	Yes 'They have their opinion and they know what they want... Therefore, as much as possible, I like to respect their suggestions'; 'I believe they have the right to say these things [that they didn't want the teachers to smoke in the school]'
BPW 88	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers express a positive view on being criticised by the pupils?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BPW 89	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers mention questioning themselves?	Interviews	Yes (6/8 teachers' answers = 75%)
BPW 90	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers mention learning from the children too?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BPW 92	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers describe themselves mostly as facilitators / moderators?	Interviews	50-50 teachers' answers
BPW 93	Children's perceptions	Do children portray teachers mostly as facilitators / moderators?	Interviews	No (19/32 children's answers = 59.4%)
BPW 96	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils in power-sharing situations in equality with the teachers?	Interviews	No (22/32 children's answers = 68.8%)
BPW 61	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils as having an influence upon the organisation and content of teaching?	Interviews	Yes (17/32 children's answers = 53.1%)
BPW 94	Children's perceptions	Do children portray the teacher as providing pupils with choices?	Interviews	Yes (18/32 children's answers = 56.3%)

Still, none of the positive results are very strong in terms of percentage and they appear to be somewhat overthrown by the fact that children in general do not portray teachers as facilitators / moderators (BPW93, 59.4% negative answers) nor do they picture pupils in power-sharing situations with teachers (BPW96, 68.8% negative answers).

Furthermore, it seems that, once again, in no way are children (and virtually parents too) involved in any decision-making procedures at the school level. This lack of participation is particularly flagrant in what concerns the procedures related with the assessment and classroom placement of children designated as having SEN (BPW97, BPW98), which is also qualitatively described in the passages ahead. Beforehand, though, a caveat must be made to the effect that the language used by the teachers was integrally transcribed and all the expressions utilised – namely with regards to children designated as having SEN – are presented in the terms in which they were proffered. Still, emphasis was added to the passages judged more relevant for this interpretation exercise.

The excerpt regards a discussion held in the last school council of the year and it focuses on the possible constitution of the ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’ in the following school year (2000 / 2001), in order to include the 16 pupils that had lost their original groups, as opposed to placing them in existing classes. These were all children designated as presenting learning difficulties who would be following either year 2, 3 or 4 curricula, depending on how many years they had failed before. The discussion proceeded as follows:

*Joana*

There’s a case I’d like to propose to the school council. It’s my pupil Z. who will be retained for another year. *I’d like to propose that he be integrated in a*



*normal class, instead of the 13<sup>th</sup> class, because he'll just get lost there... he's easily influenced by the others... I can already see that in my class now, there are already bad habits passed on to him by the others... so I'd like to have him in a normal class, where he can have better influences because he is still recoverable...*

*Francisca* But first of all we should not discard including all these children in the existing classes and terminating this '13<sup>th</sup> class' thing.

*Alice* Well, next year the school will be considered as a priority intervention area so we'll have legal covering to create the 13<sup>th</sup> class.

*Ruth* Yes, but that is an exclusion class... When we first started this class, it was to be an exception, just for that year, and now it has become the rule...

*Raquel* I'd just like to say something... there's a pedagogical issue that bothers me in what you're saying: we also have to think about the regular and the good pupils we have here... *we must not harm them just for the sake of the bad pupils.*

(...)

*Clara* In my opinion, those kids with years 2 and 3 curricula should be integrated in existing classes and then we'd do a smaller class, just with year 4 pupils.

*Ruth* I still think they should ALL be integrated in existing classes.

*Eunice* Yeah, but only if they're equally divided amongst all the classes.

*Julia* But we don't have the conditions...

*Raquel* Most classes already have more than 22 pupils... we don't have the space nor the means to add two or three more.

*Lucia* I'd only accept that if you'd take out of my class those kids following years 2 and 3 curricula.

*Eunice* I wouldn't mind [having them all]...

*Julia* Me, if you take N. [pupil designated as having SEN] out of my class I don't need a support teacher at all... But let me tell you: had I known that you were thinking about splitting up the kids in year 4, I'd have flunked a couple [of pupils] in year 3, so that they'd be put in other classes...

*Arthur* Then, I think that the youngest [those following years 2 and 3 curricula] should be integrated in existing classes.

- Raquel* Yeah, *but in the name of upholding your 'pretty-perfect' theory, the good pupils will be harmed*. We won't have the time for them... they won't progress as well as they could, because the others [those designated as having SEN] drag them down... or have very bad behavioural problems.
- Julia* Ursula, do you think *your pupils were harmed* by the fact of having such difficult cases [in their class]?
- Ursula* [who had the '13<sup>th</sup> class' in the current year]: Well... yeah, I guess so... especially the good ones...
- Julia* I rest my case then... I won't say anything else and I'll do whatever the rest of you decide.
- Francisca* Then, I'd like to ask whoever is writing the minute to make a declaration stating my position [that all pupils should be divided amongst the classes] and then I think we should take a vote.
- Joana* But *these kids will ruin the other classes...*
- Laura* For me, *that would be harming to three colleagues* [those teachers that would have year 4 classes, if all the children were divided between year 4 classes].
- Joana* So, let's divide them between ALL the classes [of every year], one in each class...
- Laura* That wouldn't make any sense!
- (...)
- Alice* I think we have discussed long enough, I'll put the first proposal up for voting [writes it on the blackboard]: 'Proposal 1 - Dividing the 4 kids following years 2 and 3 curricula between years 2 and 3 classes and create a 13<sup>th</sup> class with 12 kids following a year 4 curriculum'.
- Fernanda* [who would have a year 3 class the following year]: Yeah, keep them coming... the more [pupils] you give me, the better... [ironically] I tell you, *I'll work with those kids from whom I can get results back... with those who don't, I won't do miracles...*
- Laura* Don't say that! Because you'll give the impression that you only work with the good pupils and leave the bad ones behind... and I know for a fact that you don't do that.
- Fernanda* But if I have 26 or 27 [pupils], I know I won't be able to...



[Meanwhile, Alice was writing on the blackboard]: ‘Proposal 2 – Divide the 16 children between the classes corresponding to their curricular year and not creating the 13<sup>th</sup> class; Proposal 3 – Take out the children following years 2 and 3 curricula from their current classes, divide the 16 children between the classes corresponding to their curricular year and not creating the 13<sup>th</sup> class’.

*Alice* Let’s vote then.

*Julia* I don’t want to vote... I want to abstain. I don’t think any of the proposals is fair.

*Alice* You cannot abstain, Julia. Everybody has to vote.

[The voting takes place, by show of hands].

[Results: (names underlined are those of teachers’ that participated more closely in the study; Filipa was absent that day)

Proposal 1: Alice, Amelia, Clara, Daniel, Fernanda, Joana, Julia, Lara, Laura, Lidia, Nina, Raquel, Ursula (13 votes);

Proposal 2: Francisca, Ruth (2 votes);

Proposal 3: Arthur, Eunice, Lucia (3 votes).]

*Alice* All right, it’s the first one, then.

*Daniel* I voted that way, because I was afraid that if we didn’t form a 13<sup>th</sup> class, they [the Ministry] would say we didn’t need as many teachers and remove a teacher position from the school.

*Julia* I want to make a statement to explain my vote and to be recorded in the minutes: I can’t believe that the school council managed to propose – that’s why I didn’t want to vote – that, to relief one year 4 class [that with 12 pupils], another year 4 class [her own class] will have 28 pupils including a handicap [sic]... I just don’t get it... but I’ll conform to the decision of the school council.

*Francisca* I want to make a statement too: If that is going to be the solution [continue to have a 13<sup>th</sup> class] at least let’s stop calling that ‘the 13<sup>th</sup> class’ and let’s get used to saying that this school has four year 4 classes.

[All nod in agreement]

*Alice* Was that registered [in the minutes]? OK, there’s nothing else to discuss, then. The vote is final. Let’s start doing the lists of pupils [i.e. deciding which

year 2 and 3 pupils who had lost their original group (4 children) will be in each class].

[Laura starts putting them in classes randomly. She got to a point where there were two year 3 boys left, B. and C.. They were to be placed in Fernanda's or Arthur's class].

*Arhtur* Maybe B. can come in my class, because I already know him... I tutor him after school... he's used to me.

*Laura* OK, Fernanda, you'll have Joana's ex-pupil, C.

*Fernanda* No, no, no, wait a minute... I've heard C. *is a trouble maker*... and his family is lots of trouble too. *I don't want him in my class*.

*Arthur* But B., I already know him... and he knows me...

*Laura* Well, if you can't come to an agreement, *we'll flip a coin, then*.

[Fernanda and Arthur choose faces and Laura flips a coin. Arthur 'wins'].

*Fernanda* He's lots of trouble, isn't he [pupil C.]? I can't do any miracles... and if it goes that way, I don't even know if I'll want to stay in this school next year...

(Field-notes on 03/07/2000, school council meeting emphasis added)

It seems important to analyse this passage for two main reasons: a) because it provides evidence regarding the non-participation of children and parents in assessment procedures; and b) because it demonstrates, not only the absence of power-sharing strategies in those processes, but even the powerlessness of parents and children, as all decisions seem to be taken having the teachers' convenience as a primary criterion. This is consistent with the analysis made by Armstrong (2003) of similar situations regarding the school placement of children designated as having SEN.

a) In no point in the meeting is there evidence of children or parents having an input in this decision-making process. All the decisions were made unilaterally by the teachers.



This was noticeable, not only with regards to class placement, but also in other moments of the educational process of children designated as having SEN:

‘[the head read a list of pupils’ names proposed for extraordinary evaluation] *the teachers in the school council approved all the reports* of each of these pupils, in which were included the pupil’s characterisation, the strategies used up until the end of term 2 and the ones that will be developed in term 3. A recovery plan will be elaborated for each pupil, to be implemented in term 3’

(School council minutes dated 01/04/2000, emphasis added).

Without wanting to linger on the details of SEN processes management, it still seems important to refer that the interviews with the head, the class teachers and the support teachers (from 18/10/99 to 03/03/00) also confirmed that the whole of the SEN detection process and the implementation of measures – such as the elaboration of Individual Education Plans or the attribution of a support teacher – were the sole responsibility of the school staff, aided by the services of the regional structure of the Ministry of Education. The children were not involved at all and the parents were, at best, informed of the decisions that had been taken, as is exemplified in this passage from the minutes of a previous school council:

‘Regarding the ‘information’ point in the agenda, the head informed the school council that the Individual Education Plans are already elaborated and that they should be *signed* by the parents or guardians and archived in each pupil’s individual process’

(School council minutes dated 07/11/1999, emphasis added).

Finally, in what regards the specific issue being debated in the meeting, not only were the children nor their parents ever involved in any significant way in decision-making regarding their educational process – an attempt against participation rights as defined

by the ‘inalienable right’ view – but also their best interests (Balton, 1992; Thomas & O’Kane, 1998) seem to have been seriously undermined by the fact that those that did participate in that decision-making process, i.e. the teachers, followed no pedagogical criteria whatsoever in their decision. This is epitomised by the teachers actually flipping a coin to decide on the placement of two ‘difficult cases’, without anybody opposing such method. As mentioned in chapter 5, this episode constituted one of the occasions in which it was very difficult to maintain a non-participant role.

b) On the ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’ issue, there were two clear factions in the school, a fact that has certainly contributed to the palpable tensions in the discussion (which, in reality, lasted for almost 1 hour):

- One faction more concerned with inclusion issues, which was against the formation of the ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’ yet another year;
- One faction for whom children with learning difficulties were considered as ‘lost’ cases, which were best kept together not to ‘harm’ the other classes.

The latter position, although implicitly perceived throughout the year on the part of a number of teachers (e.g. Julia, Raquel, Joana), was never as clearly stated as in this meeting. The overt explanations for having a ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’ were that on the one hand, there were so many children left behind that it was impossible to integrate them into the already overcrowded classes. On the other hand, it was stated that with such arrangements, the resources (i.e. a support teacher) would be better put to profit because they would be concentrated, full-time, in one single class (Alice’s interview on 18/10/99).



However, it was the implicit attitude, which regarded the ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’ as not being a ‘normal’ class, that was corroborated by this excerpt: expressions such as ‘harming the good pupils and the teachers’, being ‘trouble makers’, passing on ‘bad habits’ to the others, and ‘ruining the other classes’, provide ample evidence on a very negative attitude towards children with learning difficulties. This culminates indeed with a clear and verbalised rejection: ‘I don’t want him in my class’. This interpretation is, indeed, substantiated by the interviews of two of the teachers who, while describing their career, commented on the school’s practice of attributing the ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’ to new-comers or younger teachers:

‘When I first came to this school, they gave me the 13<sup>th</sup> class... the *leftovers nobody else wanted*’.

(Filipa’s interview on 01/03/00, emphasis added).

‘(...) the *older colleagues* [i.e. the older teachers in the school] *were a bit mean* and so, when I arrived here, they decided to give me the 13<sup>th</sup> class... which was composed of TEN boys in state custody. Instead of distributing them amongst the classes, they had decided to group them all in one class... and, *as I was the youngest*, they gave it to me’

(Clara’s interview on 07/02/00, emphasis added).

The compromise solution found in the meeting still foresaw the formation of a ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’, which the more ‘pro-inclusion’ faction tried to de-stigmatise by proposing that they consider it as ‘just another year 4 class’. In a subsequent personal conversation with Laura, a year after these events (July 2001), the researcher learned that in the following school year (2001/2002) all the children were integrated into existing classes and the 13<sup>th</sup> class was abolished. That did not imply, however, that the children or their parents were involved or shared the power with the teachers to any greater extent in decision-making processes.

6.8.2. Event-related indicators and analysis

The picture presented in the background does not seem to improve when the observed lessons are considered (table 6.13). Once again, the purpose of the assessment was to determine the presence of structures and procedures enabling power-sharing, as well as to ascertain its existence in adult-child relationships.

Table 6.13: School level event-related results for Element 6 of the indicator set  
(Participation as a powersharing issue)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	School's results
PW39	Observable	Are children informed about the programme of the activity?	School: informal observation notes;	No for the school in general
PW40	Observable	Are there work programmes / plan (individual / collective) defined by the pupils for the activity?	Classroom: informal observation notes	No (6/8 classrooms = 75%)
PW38	Observable	Are children's complaints taken seriously?	Classroom: informal observation notes	50 –50 classrooms
PW41	Observable	Is there non-directive teaching?	Classroom: observation schedules	Yes School average: 3.4%
PW8	Observable	Does the activity involve children making choices?	Classroom: observation schedules	No (5/8 classrooms = 62.5%)
PW42 A (consult) B (order)	Observable	Does the action stem from joint discussion?	Classroom: observation schedules	No (7/8 classrooms = 87.5%) A: School average of 'consultation' interactions: 7.3% B: School average of 'order' interactions: 9.8%
PW43 A (question) B (consult)	Observable	Does the activity involve more 'consultation – expression of opinion' sequences than 'question – answer' sequences?	Classroom: observation schedules	No A: School average question: 20.1% B: School average consult: 17.6%

As it can be appreciated in table 6.13, children are apparently not participating either in fora or in processes involving decision-making (PW39, PW40, PW8). Moreover – and in what regards adult-child relationships – the low values of non-directed activities (PW41, 3.4%) associated with the high values of interactions based on orders from the teachers (PW42, virtually 10% of the total interactions) seem to indicate the presence of generally more autocratic than powersharing relationships.



These results tend to confirm the pattern observed in the background section as well as those in sections 6.5 and 6.7, to the effect that the whole-school performance with regards to powersharing is not in line with a participation-oriented ethos.

## **6.9. Conclusion**

This chapter constitutes a preliminary stage in the analysis of results. Its main goals were to assess the presence of participation in a context with low influence of statutory measures as well as determining whether this school could be classified as a participation-oriented or saturated ethos. In what concerns the latter – and as it could be appreciated throughout the different sections of the chapter – the overall results at the school level were not very positive: with regards to the majority of the elements (sections 6.2 to 6.8), the school's performance does not correspond to the standard that would be necessary in order to classify it as a participation-oriented or -saturated ethos.

However, regarding the former goal, the findings seem to indicate the presence of participation traits, especially in what concerns the indicators based on the classrooms' aggregated results. This being a context with a low level of influence from statutory measures, the presence of such traits would tend to confirm the position discussed in chapter 4, which proposes the non-vitality of statutory dispositions when it comes to the development of participation in primary school (Hammad, 1999).

Still, a fundamental aspect arising from the analysis described in this chapter was the inconstancy of those results: there were discrepancies between the classes in the way participation was expressed and even as to the presence or absence of certain of its elements. It becomes, therefore, necessary to examine what those differences are, where

they lie exactly and what *factors* determine their occurrence in such a manner. The determination of those factors will be the main goal of the two following chapters in this thesis.

Therefore, if the reasoning proposed by the mainstream line in the literature as well as the propositions of the majority of statutory measures, is followed, the determining factors would be:

a) the children's age (Casas,1997), which, for the purposes of this research, can be hypothesised as follows: If the children's age is a determining factor, then it will be expected that younger children's classes will have a poorer performance than older children's classes when confronted with the indicator set.

b) the children's personal characteristics (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998) – in the present case, being designated as having SEN and academic status – which, for the purposes of the current study, can be hypothesised as follows: If being designated as having SEN is a determining factor, then it will be expected that the results of children designated as having SEN, when confronted with the indicator set, will be more negative than those of children not designated as having SEN. Also, if the academic status is a determining factor, then it will be expected that the results of children with a high academic status, when confronted with the indicator set, will be more positive than those of the other children. (This hypothesis will be addressed in chapter 8).

Another hypothesis that is briefly addressed in the literature (e.g. Pridmore, 2000) but has not been explored very much up to present and has certainly not been as developed as the previous two, is that of adults' ideology and attitudes towards participation being a determining factor in the children's exercise of that participation. This notion can be hypothesised as follows:



If adults' ideology and attitudes towards participation are a determining factor in the children's exercise of that participation, then it will be expected that classes where teachers have more negative perceptions and attitudes towards participation will have a more negative performance, when confronted with the indicator set, than classes where those perceptions and attitudes are more positive.

These aspects cannot, however, be determined just at the school level, which confirms the need to investigate them at the classroom and individual levels.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Results and analysis at the classroom level**

#### **7.1. Introduction: the class level as the main level of analysis**

This chapter encompasses the most significant portion of data presentation and analysis. It explores the research questions further and assesses the hypotheses advanced in chapter 6. In that chapter, it was argued that Santa Maria did not possess a cohesive school policy and practice in the domain of participation. This was mainly demonstrated by the classes' discrepant results and lack of unified line of action. It is believed that many answers with regards as to why that happened can be found at the current level of analysis, i.e. the classroom level.

For that purpose, the indicators judged pertinent for the classroom level were applied to each and every class under study. The results obtained were afterwards explored through a K-Means Cluster Analysis, a procedure that attempts to identify homogeneous groups of cases based on selected characteristics (for a more detailed description of the procedure followed see Appendix 8). It was considered that such technique would allow for the determination of groups of more or less participation-oriented classes. Furthermore, by exploring the elements that justify such groupings, the pertinence of each of the hypotheses proposed could be discussed. In practical terms, and for the purpose of this chapter, this can be operationalised as follows:

- a) if the children's age is a determining factor in the children's exercise of participation, when a cluster analysis is performed on the results of each class, it will be expected that clusters will be formed around age groups;



b) if adults' ideology and attitudes towards participation are a determining factor in the children's exercise of that participation, when a cluster analysis is performed on the results of each class, it will be expected that clusters will be formed around the similarity of teachers' attitudes;

c) if children's personal characteristics are a determining factor in the children's exercise of that participation, when a cluster analysis is performed on the results of each child, it will be expected that clusters will be formed around the similarity of their personal characteristics.

The latter hypothesis, although discussed several times in this chapter, will constitute the main object of chapter 8 which is dedicated to the individual level. Therefore, the current chapter will concentrate in exploring hypotheses a) and b):

Firstly, similarities and differences will be analysed to try to identify what characterises the more and less participation-oriented clusters and classes, with regards to each of the elements that compose the 'inalienable right' view, as well as what differentiates them from one another. Secondly, an attempt will be made to identify and discuss what factors influence participation the most, in order to justify the types of clustering found.

The presentation will start, however, by an analysis of the overall results of the indicator set. Afterwards, following the structure presented in chapter 6, the background and event-related results and analysis for each element of the 'inalienable right' view will be presented. These will be complemented, where appropriate, by the use of qualitative data (Tierney, 2002).

Before moving on to such a presentation, a few aspects need to be taken into consideration for a better understanding of the sections to come:

a) As in chapter 6, the ‘Elements’ used in the tables of the current chapter refer to the different elements of the indicator set which were based on the six characteristics of the ‘inalienable right’ view. Once again, whenever preceded by a ‘B’, these elements pertain to background indicators, and when not, they pertain to event-related indicators.

Hence:

**BU / U:** refer to element 1 – Universality of the right and its exercise;

**BD / D:** refer to element 2 – Non-discrimination in the access to participation;

**BN / N:** refer to element 3 – Non-traditional conception of children and childhood;

**BP / P:** refer to element 4 – Participation being beneficial for children;

**BDC / DC:** refer to element 5 – Development of democracy and citizenship;

**BPW / PW:** refer to element 6 – Participation as a powersharing issue.

b) Apart from the ‘13<sup>th</sup> class’, in Santa Maria the classes were generally designated by the name of their teacher, e.g. ‘this is Sandra’s class’. Although all the names used in this thesis are fictitious, the decision was taken to maintain that type of designation. For that reason, whenever a teacher’s name appears in the tables ahead, it should be read as ‘X’s class’. For further clarity, the year taught by that teacher was also included.

c) Cells in grey in the tables pertain to indicators that, while having produced interesting results, could not be used in the cluster analysis. Unless otherwise stated, the reason for that exclusion was that such indicators could not be applied to all classes – indicated in the tables as N/A – a fact which invalidates the above mentioned type of analysis.

d) As it includes a multiplicity of sources, the indicator set comprises also a variety of scales at this level – even if all the answers can be transformed into a simple ‘yes / no’ response system – which were used so that the results could be statistically analysed and



the cluster analysis could be carried out. These scales are present in tables 7.2 to 7.12 and include:

- 0 / 1: represent, respectively, a 'no' and a 'yes';
- 0 / 100: represent the percentage of the total interactions that was taken up, in a given class, by the specific one mentioned in the indicator; e.g. BU7: does the activity involve children giving their opinion? Result in class X = 10%. This would imply that 10% of the total interventions were categorised as 'children giving their opinion'; etc. Owing to space constraints the 'operationalisation' section of the indicator set could not be included in these tables. Therefore, the specific interaction being considered in each element can be found in annex 7.
- 0 / 4: represent the scales of the Susan Harter's profiles (Harter, 1985; Harter & Pike, 1984) and the 'participation scale'; results above 2 are considered as positive and results equal or below 2 are considered as negative. They are indicated with two decimals in the tables as this was judged necessary to illustrate the differences between the results.
- 0 / .25 / .5 / .75 / 1: represent the number of children providing a positive answer during the interviews; respectively 0 = no children; .25 = 1 child; .5 = 2 children; .75 = 3 children; 1 = the four children. These were transformed in this way so that the results could be statistically analysed. They are indicated with two decimals in the tables as this was judged necessary to illustrate the differences between the results.

e) In tables 7.2 to 7.12, below the results of the individual classes, the average of the cluster is also indicated in bold characters.

7.2. Overall results and preliminary analysis

Table 7.1: Overall results at the class level

Elements	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
	Nina	Ruth	Filipa	Arthur	Eunice	Lucia	Laura	Clara
BU	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
U	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
BD	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-
D	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	+
BN	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
N	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
BP	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
BDC	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
DC	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	+
BPW	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	+
PW	-	+-	-	+	-	-	-	+

This table (table 7.1) has the intention of providing only a first overview of the results, as these will be more profoundly discussed in the sections pertaining to each of the elements. It presents the overall clustering results for each class along the totality of the elements that compose the indicator set ('+' represent the results belonging to a 'more participation-oriented' cluster and '-' indicates the results belonging to a 'less participation-oriented' cluster).

A positive aspect that can be noticed from the beginning is that there seems to be a reasonable intra-scale coherence, because the results within most of the classes are similar across the different elements of the indicator set. In fact, certain class patterns appear to emerge, with some classes qualifying themselves systematically in the more participation-oriented cluster and with others tending to be placed more often in the less participatory one. A discussion about these patterns will be presented later in the chapter. However, it can be mentioned that, at first glance, the clustering does not seem to align along 'age-related' dimensions.



An initial appraisal can also be made as to which elements appear to contribute more significantly to differentiate more and less participative classes/ environments: the element regarding the ‘benefits of participation’ (BP), for instance, is one in which the overall performance is more positive. There are differences between the clusters but the classes’ results are generally favourable, with little differentiation.

An explanation for such results could be that type of element is less ‘controversial’, which would imply that it is easier to sustain a participation-oriented ‘discourse’ regarding them (a discourse in this context is meant as a line of thought sustained by all sorts of sources, not just an oral discourse). Still, presenting solely a participation-oriented discourse/ background – although it is a positive beginning – is not a guarantee of children’s effective exercise of participation rights; the event-related results have to be positive as well. It is therefore not enough for an ethos to demonstrate positive results in that area to be considered as participation-oriented. In fact, holding such an approach would be the equivalent of the position sometimes volunteered by the statutory view – which was criticised in the literature review – that the existence of legislative measures in this domain is an indicator of children’s participation.

The differentiation is clearer when more ‘demanding’ sections are in question because, on the one hand, they seem to require a more ‘liberal’ / committed discourse, and on the other hand, it is expected that the person’s behaviour will correspond to the discourse sustained, i.e. that expressed intentions are put into practice.

It appears, therefore, that the elements that more accurately differentiate the more from the less participation-oriented cluster would be ‘non-discrimination’ (BD, D), ‘democracy and citizenship’ (BDC, DC) and ‘powersharing’ (BPW, PW). This will be

discussed in the course of the chapter. The objectives of the following sections with regards to each of the elements will then be:

- a) commenting on the differences between more and less participation-oriented clusters;
- b) which will lead onto the characterisation of each of them, i.e. what distinguishes more participatory backgrounds and events from less participation-oriented ones;
- c) trying to explain why those differences occur, what motivates them, as well as justifying the placement of the different classes in each cluster;
- d) which will lead onto the discussion on the factors that most closely influence participation.

### **7.3. Element 1: Universality of the right and its exercise**

#### **7.3.1. Background results and analysis**

As seen in table 7.2, the more participation-oriented cluster presents consistently higher results in every indicator, without exception. However, the aspect that appears to differentiate the clusters the most is that of teachers' attitudes towards participation (indicators BU2 to BU11): the more participation-oriented cluster portrays unanimously positive results (0.75 to 1) while the other cluster demonstrates virtually exclusively negative ones (0 to 0.25).



Table 7.2: Classroom level background results for Element 1 of the indicator set  
(Universality of the right and its exercise)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1				Cluster 2			
				Less participation-oriented				More participation-oriented			
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Lucia (Year 3)	Clara (Year 4)
BU2	Teachers' perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
BU3	Children's perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	0-1	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	0	0
BU7	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers belong to or identify with an educational movement endorsing participation ideals? If yes,	0-1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1
				0.25				0.75			
BU8	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers value 'active' pedagogies?	0-1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0.25				1			
BU9	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray participation as a fundamental aspect of	0-1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
				0.25				1			
BU10	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray themselves as capable of working in a participation-	0-1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
				0.25				1			
BU11	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers present a non-limited view on participation?	0-1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0.25				1			
BU13	Children's perceptions	Do children purport teachers in participation-oriented terms?	0-1	0	0	0.5	0	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75
				0.13				0.75			
BU12	Children's perceptions	Do children purport pupils in participation situations?	0-1	0.25	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	1	1	1
				0.44				1			
BU14	Children's perceptions	Do children consider their current participation as positive?	0-4	1.93	2.24	2.46	2.35	3.44	3.14	2.55	2.56
				2.25				2.92			
BU15	Children's perceptions	Does children's perceived current participation meet up with their desired participation?	0-1	N/A	N/A	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0
BU16	Children's perceptions	Do children make claims for a more participation-oriented / active school?	0-1	0.25	0.75	0.75	1	0.75	1	1	1
				0.69				0.94			
BU17	Children's perceptions	Do children perceive their participation as similar in different moments?	0-4 (a)	1.71	1.73	2.48	2.32	3.28	3.07	2.5	2.6
				2.06				2.86			
			0-4 (b)	1.71	2.48	2.5	2.73	3.55	3.37	2.74	2.93
				2.36				3.15			
			0-4 (c)	3.36	2.3	2.4	2	3.5	3	2.4	2.5
				2.52				2.76			
BU19	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			

In fact, differences between clusters are evident not only in quantitative terms but also qualitatively. A qualitative illustration of attitudinal differences in this domain lies in the comparative analysis between the teachers' responses in cluster 1 and 2. In cluster 2, the responses can be characterised as possessing two main features. Firstly, there is a stated belief in participation as a value and as a useful pedagogical tool; and, secondly, the exercise of participation is portrayed as unconditional:



‘I like to diversify, and that they feel happy and enjoy what they are doing... that’s why I never give them ‘ready-to-use’ work... there’s always something for them to build and discover on their own... (...) I believe that way the lesson is not passive’.

(Clara’s interview on 07/02/00)

‘I believe it’s easier for them to learn by using different materials than by the teacher just exposing things’.

(Lucia’s interview on 14/02/00)

The more negative attitudes, i.e. those pertaining to cluster 1, seem to be of a composite nature and be expressed in, at least, two different forms. One is that manifested by the teachers who clearly indicate having other primordial values in their practice:

‘I don’t let them do other activities before having finished their work (...) Maybe this is the defect of being a traditional teacher but I give MUCH MORE IMPORTANCE to Portuguese and Maths than to other activities, because I believe they’re not as important for their future’.

(Laura’s interview on 01/02/00)

‘I see people doing beautiful and wonderful things with the pupils, but... I wouldn’t be able to! (...) I don’t have the patience! Maybe it’s because of the lack of enjoyment for what I’m doing (...) but my goal is just for them to learn how to read, how to write, be still and behave’.

(Nina’s interview on 24/02/00)

One difference between these two teachers is that while Laura appears to express this type of idea based on strong convictions, Nina seems to uphold them because she doubts her own competence as a professional to work in any other way. Nonetheless, both these teachers make a portrait of participation not as an encompassing way to



work, but as being exclusive to more ‘fun activities’, which are not seen as ‘serious work’. They present themselves as having more academic-oriented values and focusing their efforts on the ‘hard core’ subjects – Portuguese, Maths, learning how to read and write – which they declare teaching in a more ‘traditional’ way, preclusive of the children’s active participation.

The other type of attitude manifested by teachers in cluster 1 is more related to the place participation occupies in the hierarchy of teachers’ values (Staub & Stern, 2002): while manifesting and stating a belief in it as an appropriate educational tool, some teachers apparently consider that other values or difficulties are stronger than those related to participation, clearly waiving it when faced with supposedly adverse situations. This is consistent with the results obtained by Tal and Yinon (2002) in a recent study of teachers’ values and how the latter influence their practice. In the present case, this is exemplified by a type of response in which the teachers state a positive attitude towards participation but do recognise that they do not uphold it in practice:

‘I think it [child participation] is a very good ideal but I don’t know that I’d be able to put that into practice (...) I think it’s very difficult; I don’t know if I’d be able to do that. But I’ve never had much of a chance of trying that out either... we don’t have the conditions in this school to do this kind of work. There are no physical conditions; there’s no materials... (...) I don’t have the time or... it’s lots of hard work’.

(Filipa’s interview on 01/03/00)

This portrays, in fact, a different attitude from that manifested by teachers in cluster 2, who do not indicate poor material conditions, the lack of time or the amount of effort required, as constituting an impediment to the exercise of participation.

In what concerns the children’s perceptions – which can be interpreted as reflective of their personal experience in class – there are also some points worth mentioning. These

regard, on the one hand, the children's perception of their current level of participation and, on the other hand, the portrait they make of their daily classroom experience in that domain.

With respect to the latter aspect (BU12, BU13) the quantitative results do, in fact, appear to be more positive in cluster 2. The qualitative responses provide an even better insight, allowing for the comparison between the portraits drawn by children in clusters 1 and 2 of both pupils (BU12) and teachers (BU13). For that purpose, one should consider the following excerpts regarding, firstly, the portrait of the pupils in the classroom made by children in cluster 2:

'The exercise was on the means of transportation that they [the pupils] liked best... and they had chosen it'.

(Joel, year 2, Arthur's class, on 09/06/00)

'We were in the classroom and we were going to present our work to the rest of the class'.

(Edgar, year 2, Arthur's class, on 09/06/00)

And then in cluster 1:

'We write down our summaries and do the exercises in the exercise book'.

(Marcia, year 2, Filipa's class, on 07/06/00)

'I wrote a text and the teacher said it was very beautiful... [but] I didn't read it aloud in the classroom; the teacher did'.

(Rosa, year 2, Filipa's class, on 08/06/00)

Although these are both year 2 classes, the children's portrait of pupils' experience is quite different, sometimes even diametrically opposed (please refer to Edgar's and



Rosa's response). While both the answers in cluster 2 attribute pupils an active role in the classroom, those in cluster 1 portray them as more passive and just doing as they are told. This tendency is maintained when the teachers' portraits are considered, first in cluster 2:

'[In order to assess work] Ruth would show the worksheets to everybody and we voted'

(Maria, year 1, Ruth's class, on 07/06/00)

'Then we were finished... she [the teacher] would tell us we could go and choose a book to read'

(Antonio, year 1, Ruth's class, on 07/06/00)

And then in cluster 1:

'[If I were the teacher] the pupils could only speak... when I'd tell them to'

(Carla, year 4, Laura's class, on 06/06/00)

'She [the teacher] tells us what to do... Sometimes she writes down on the blackboard and then we read and mark the pages... and other times she just says [what the work is]'

(Cristina, year 2, Filipa's class, on 07/06/00)

Indeed, while the teachers in the first case are described as implicating children in their learning processes, in the second case they are portrayed as more authoritarian and as not decentralising the focus of the lesson from themselves.

Concerning the former aspect – i.e. the children's perception of their current participation – results in cluster 2 seem, once again, to be consistently higher than those presented in cluster 1. In order to help determine whether the apparent divergences were

significant, a T-test was performed on the relevant indicators (BU14, BU17). The T-test revealed that there were, indeed, significant differences in the children's appreciation both of their overall level of participation [BU14:  $t_{(159.61)} = -7.74, p < 0.001$ ] and of their participation in specific moments of the classrooms life: decision-making [BU17A:  $t_{(160.88)} = -6.30, p < 0.001$ ]; teaching and learning tasks [BU17B:  $t_{(156.66)} = -6.40, p < 0.001$ ]; and assessment [BU17C:  $t_{(160.81)} = -4.24, p < 0.001$ ]. Even if these results indicate that children in cluster 2 have a more positive appreciation of their current level of participation, all children enquired seem, nonetheless, to desire that level to be increased (BU15, BU16). Whether there is a link between these results and the classroom practice remains to be seen in the next section of this chapter.

### 7.3.2. Event-related results and analysis

The first aspect that comes out of table 7.3 is that there are no disparities in the classes' cluster belonging between background and event-related indicators. This is followed by a surprising result: if one considers only quantitative indicators, it may seem that the more and less participative clusters are inverted, for it is in the less participative that the percentage of children's interventions is higher (U4, 47.1% of the total interactions) and the percentage of teacher's direct instruction is lower (U9, 49.5% of the total interactions). However, an ensemble of more qualitative indicators helps elucidate this issue by providing information also on the nature of participation in each cluster.



Table 7.3: Classroom level event-related results for Element 1 of the indicator set  
(Universality of the right and its exercise)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1				Cluster 2			
				Less participation-oriented				More participation-oriented			
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Lucia (Year 3)	Clara (Year 4)
U1	Observable	Is the activity part of everyday school life?	0-1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
				1				1			
U3	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation in the activity?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
				0				0.75			
U4	Observable	Are children intervening in the activity?	0-100	39.5	42.5	50.2	56.2	38.4	43.3	50.2	51.6
				47.1				45.9			
U5	Observable	Does the activity involve children being informed?	0-100	0	0	0	0	0.13	0.29	0	0
				0				0.11			
U6	Observable	Does the activity involve children being consulted?	0-100	6.7	5.8	2.8	1.7	9.7	10.2	4.2	8.6
				4.2				8.2			
U7	Observable	Does the activity involve children giving their opinion?	0-100	11.8	4.8	13.1	14.1	9.3	12.3	8.8	22.9
				10.9				13.3			
U9	Observable	Is there a low incidence of direct instruction from the teacher?	0-100	54.5	50.9	49	43.8	52.8	56.7	49.8	48.4
				49.5				51.9			
U10	Observable	Do children do instruction / present their work to the others?	0-100	0	0.2	0	0	0.4	3.4	0.2	0
				0.04				1			
U11	Observable	Is there a low incidence of children's individual tasks?	0-100	4.3	17	9.9	8.5	9.7	14.5	7.4	9.1
				9.9				10.2			
U12	Observable	Do children maintain their participation in the activity?	0-100	4.2	2.9	0.6	2.1	0.7	0.3	0.7	2.3
				2.4				1			
U13	Observable	Do child-initiated interactions have an impact in the unfolding of the activity? (see annex 7 for each specific item)	0-100 (ap)	5.8	1.8	0.8	1.7	3.1	4.7	0	10.2
				2.54				4.51			
			0-100 (an)	3.5	14.6	4.1	6	0	2.4	4.5	6.1
				7				3.2			
			0-100 (bp)	0	0	0	0	1.6	0	0	6.1
				0				1.9			
			0-100 (bn)	11.6	1.8	0	4.3	7.8	1.2	6	2
				4.4				4.3			
			0-100 (cp)	24.4	7.3	21.3	21.4	61.8	67.1	56.7	48
				18.6				58.4			
			0-100 (cn)	41.9	21.8	41.8	52.1	14.1	5.9	19.4	6.1
				39.4				11.4			
			0-100 (dp)	5.8	25.5	2.5	2.6	1.6	5.9	4.5	5.1
				9.1				4.3			
			0-100 (dn)	5.8	1.8	1.6	0.9	1.6	2.4	1.5	1
				2.5				1.6			
U15 a) DM b) TLT c) Assess	Observable	Is the level of participation maintained similar in different moments?	0-100 (a)	4.2	9.4	1.8	2.7	5.1	4.1	2.6	7.8
				4.5				4.9			
			0-100 (b)	54.6	53	57.1	51.4	59.8	67.6	50.7	64
				54				60.5			
			0-100 (c)	50.1	29.4	37.8	37.3	31.1	26	36.5	20
				33.8				28.4			

These indicators seem to confirm cluster 1 as the less participation oriented as in no occasion is there information imparted to the children (U5) and the level of child consultation (U6) is almost half of that present in cluster 2 (cluster 1: 4.2%; cluster 2: 8.2%). Furthermore, children in cluster 1 classes seem to give their opinion (U7, cluster 1: 0.1%; cluster 2: 13.3%) and present their work to the class (U10, cluster 1: 0.04%; cluster 2: 1%) in lower levels. When engaged in an activity, they also seem not to maintain their participation or their interest at high levels, abandoning it more often than children in the more participative cluster (U12, cluster 1: 2.4% of interactions off-task; cluster 2: 1%).

Last but not least, even if the children in cluster 1 intervene more often, the impact of and the response to their interventions is radically different between clusters (U13). While in the less participative cluster the response is, more often than not, quite negative (being ignored, being told off), in the more participative it is systematically positive. In fact, for all but one sub-indicator – which regards management questions (U13dp) – the results are actually inverted: in cluster 1, the level of negative response is always higher than that of positive feed-back, whereas in cluster 2 the opposite situation is verified. Within the totality of interventions accounted for (U13f), children in cluster 1 will have had almost 60% of negative feed-back (U13fn). On the other hand, that feed-back will have been almost 80% positive for children in cluster 2 (U13fp).

These results could help explain the discrepancies on children's perceptions of their participation which were observed in the background section. They can also indicate substantial differences with regards to the classroom environment and the quality of children's participation (Hammersley, 1984b). Qualitative material also supports the statement above as it demonstrates that the pedagogical tools used and actual activities



developed in the lessons observed, implicate different levels of child involvement. An example of one such situation can be provided:

Conveniently, the exact same lesson was observed both in a cluster 1 and in a cluster 2 class: the observation in question refers to a year 2 ‘environmental and social studies’ lesson in which children were to learn certain objects’ physical properties such as flexibility, solubility, transparency, opacity, etc. The goal was to fill in a worksheet answering questions such as: ‘what happens when you mix sugar with water? What happens when you bend an aluminium rod and a piece of chalk?’ reaching conclusions on the relevant properties.

The researcher’s field-notes (respectively on 14 and 15/05/00) indicate that while the teacher in cluster 2 brought in the materials for the children to proceed to the experiments in pairs, taking notes and reaching a consensual conclusion on the properties of the objects; the children in cluster 1 filled in the work-sheet individually, with no visual support and without performing the actual experiments. Several factors could have contributed to these differences (e.g. lack of time, lack of materials, etc.); however it is believed that this example provides further confirmation with regards to the accuracy of the portrait of classroom practice put forward by the background indicators as well as by the data in chapter 6: this section seems to indicate that, in fact, although attending the same school, children in different classes appear to have diverse participation experiences. The purpose of the next section will be to determine if that experience is also divergent in an intra-class context, i.e. it will be discussed whether all children in the same class have equal access and equal opportunities to exercise their participation rights.



## 7.4. Element 2: Non-discrimination in the access to participation

### 7.4.1. Background results and analysis

Table 7.4: Classroom level background results for Element 2 of the indicator set  
(Non-discrimination in the access to participation)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1					Cluster 2		
				Less participation-oriented					More participation-oriented		
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Lucia (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Clara (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)
BD20	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers refer to non-discrimination in access to participation as a principle?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0					1		
BD21	Children's perceptions	Do children portray everybody participating in the classroom and not only the 'good' pupils?	0-1	1	0	0.75	0	0	1	1	1
				0.35					1		
BD25	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray children designated as having SEN as capable of participation in the classroom in similar terms to those of the other children?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0					1		
BD26	Teachers' perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as being fully part of the class?	0-1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
				0.4					1		
BD27	Children's perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as being fully part of the class?	0-1	1	0	0	0.5	0.5	1	0.75	1
				0.45					0.92		
BD28	Teachers' perceptions	Is the support teacher portrayed as non-exclusive for the children designated as having SEN?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0					1		
BD29	Children's perceptions	Is the support teacher portrayed as non-exclusive for the children designated as having SEN?	0-1	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	1	0.25	0
BD30	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers affirm that children designated as having SEN should do the same work / work on the same subject as the rest of the class?	0-1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
				0.2					1		
BD31	Children's perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as doing the same work / working on the same subject as the rest of the class?	0-1	0.75	0	N/A	0.25	0	N/A	0	N/A
BD32	Children's perceptions	Do children designated as having SEN have a perception of their participation similar to that of children designated as 'normal'?	0-4 (a)	2.08	2.29	2.83	2.25	2.17	4	2.92	2.33
a) SEN				2.32					3.08		
b) no SEN			0-4 (b)	1.9	2.23	2.53	2.37	2.6	3.38	3.17	2.46
				2.33					3		

The main emphasis of this section is put upon the participants' attitudes, which are analysed in order to determine whether non-discrimination is a characteristic of the classrooms' context. The results present in table 7.4 portray a very discrepant situation in what regards those perceptions and attitudes: while the more participative cluster demonstrates an almost unanimously positive result in all attitudinal indicators (BD20



to BD30), the performance of the other cluster is far from that status. Yet, the interest of these results resides less in the fact that differences may exist between the clusters than in the amplitude of those differences. This is, indeed, one of the elements of the ‘inalienable right’ view in which the disparity of results between clusters 1 and 2 is more accentuated; in some cases, the results are even diametrically opposed (e.g. BD28; BD30). Besides, the fact that the distribution of classes between clusters is not equivalent entails an added negative effect, as it is the less participative cluster which encompasses the majority of classes (i.e. cluster 1: 5 classes; cluster 2: 3 classes).

The combination of the above-mentioned factors supports the view that the majority of classes in this school would not constitute a very interesting environment in terms of non-discrimination. Three excerpts from an interview with a teacher belonging to cluster 1 may help elucidate the nature of a more discriminatory discourse with regards to academic status:

‘In History *some* of them do research and present their work in the class’;

‘*those who have the talent* will participate in making the flowers [for the Mardi Gras costume]’;

‘I always try to make... every one of them become like the best pupil and not bring the level of the lessons down just because some of them can’t reach the same level: those who are good and manifest an interest in learning *should always be given the possibility of being better and progressing. They can’t be held back or... have their hands tied up because of some people in the class who can’t follow the rhythm* and need to have things levelled down... I don’t agree with doing that: I think these [good] pupils help raise the level of the whole class’.

(Laura’s interview, on 01/02/00, emphasis added)

Laura's discourse can be interpreted as clearly setting the 'good' pupils apart from the rest of the class – particularly from those experiencing learning difficulties – in at least two instances: the first one concerns the participation in teaching and learning tasks. She admits that only 'some' of the pupils or 'those who have talent' will perform certain activities, which would constitute a discriminatory practice in the access to specific participation fora.

Secondly, and more seriously, she admits to planning her lessons in function of the good pupils' level, notwithstanding the fact that some of the pupils with learning difficulties cannot reach the same level. This would potentially exclude these pupils from acceding to the main participation forum: the lessons themselves. These divergences, although relevant in the issue of academic status (BD20, BD21), are particularly expressive with respect to indicators concerning children designated as having SEN (BD25 to BD31). This is also qualitatively corroborated by the following excerpt:

[Filipa elaborates on the case of four children in her class who are designated as having SEN and work in a separate group at the back of the classroom. For half of the school day they work with the support teacher, Angela]: 'It's a type of work *I find extremely difficult and unrewarding*... Sometimes we ask ourselves if it is worth investing [in the work with children with SEN]... Maybe it is, because at least we can say: I did the best I knew and could... But, in the end, we see that all the work we had is lost and that nothing we did... remains. (...) I find that there are always children who need [educational] support, but I think that there must be someone else who... maybe likes that kind of work more than [I do]. There are people who study learning difficulties... and I believe that maybe *they'd be better prepared than I am*. Because, in the end, the truth is that the *training we received is more oriented towards... working with classes with an intermediate level*. And I think that those children [SEN] need someone that gives them MORE than we [the regular class teachers] know by intuition or from our own experience! (...) And these [SEN] pupils in



my classroom... we tell them things time and time again... and we try to present the situation in all sorts of different shapes and forms... and NOTHING remains... With this little group of children, one arrives at the end of the year and asks: What have I accomplished this year?... And you look back and you accomplished nothing. Nothing remained. (...) They have to remain in the classrooms the whole time... It's the law... But people should come and see the conditions my class has to overcome (...). Even in terms of speaking and listening... it's disturbing... I guess I'm more disturbing to her than she [teacher Angela] is to me, but... in the end the children are the ones that get harmed... Because, those who are at the back of the classroom... they hear teacher Angela's work and they end up getting distracted by *her pupils... And her pupils, they hear my voice...* and I'm speaking louder than her; they hear the other kids; and the normal agitation of the class and... they get disturbed (...) When teacher Angela leaves... if one day they are willing to work, they still do some little things and I try to follow them and check on what they're doing... but if they don't want to work, there's no use! They'll do nothing'.

(Filipa's interview, on 02/03/00, emphasis added)

It can be said that, in this passage, children designated as having SEN are portrayed as often unwilling to work and as invariably unable to progress, which denotes a less positive attitude towards them. Moreover, this teacher declares not finding herself equipped to work with these children, for she finds that kind of work 'extremely difficult and unrewarding'. That work, according to her own words, is done almost exclusively by the support teacher, Angela. Perhaps the most revealing aspect of an attitude which would exclude pupils designated as having SEN from the main forum of participation (Hallam et al., 2003), is that the teacher does not even seem to consider these children as her own pupils: in her view, they are merely placed in her class because 'the law' says so, but they are seen as 'belonging' to the support teacher Angela, to the point where Filipa admits not working with those pupils consistently after Angela leaves (this class had only a half-time support teacher). It is believed that this situation would represent less of a problem if these children were following a

stimulating programme where differentiation was at the forefront of concerns (Meirieu, 1992). Under such circumstances, even if they did not participate in the main forum of the classroom, they would be participating at high levels in their own learning processes. Unfortunately, both the observations in class and the analysis of their individual educational plans, confirm the impression that that did not seem to be the case. It appeared, as Filipa mentions, that the children were only ‘physically’ placed in that class for administrative reasons. Furthermore – and perhaps more seriously – as the support teacher only worked half-time and the class teacher admits to not feeling very comfortable in working with the children designated as having SEN, these children were virtually left to themselves during half of the school day. This was not only volunteered by Filipa but was also corroborated by the in-class observations.

Subtleties can be observed, however, in the type of attitudes present in cluster 1: some teachers do not score high in this domain, as they did not score high with regards to participation in general either (section 7.3. of this chapter). It can, therefore, be deduced that it is not that they express a negative attitude in the domain of non-discrimination in particular, but that they simply do not appear to endorse participation as a principle or as a value central to their practice. It is believed that is the case of the two teachers cited above.

Other teachers, such as Lucia, for instance, present a different and simultaneously interesting portrait: they score high in the sections regarding participation in general (section 7.3. of this chapter), however, they demonstrate lower scores with regards to non-discrimination. The explanation might reside in that teachers like Lucia, while possessing a generally very good attitude towards participation, do not extend that attitude towards *all* the children. Lucia shows, in that sense, an apparently limited view



on participation rights, for it lacks the element of non-discrimination. This is, indeed, translated into her practice, as can be appreciated ahead (table 7.5).

Eunice's class, on the other hand, illustrates the opposite situation: even if her class' overall results are not as positive (section 7.3.), she states dedicating great care and attention into ensuring that children designated as having SEN are indeed participating in class:

'I've always defended that principle... the integration and the inclusion [of children designated as having SEN] in the classroom. (...) Bruno, of course, has a disability and limitations that come from that disability... which the others don't, isn't it? The others, are children who, apparently, are... so-called normal and therefore... who sometimes have difficulties for other reasons. (...) Bruno has always had a support teacher... who, sometimes tries to meet his specific needs... but generally that support teacher is there to help me manage the class... (...) I don't want him [Bruno] to feel that there is a support teacher exclusively for him... so I ask that colleague and he ends up helping me manage the class.

(Eunice's interview, on 03/02/00)

These positive results are noticeable both in background (table 7.4) and in event-related indicators (table 7.5). Therefore, it is interesting to remark that even if children as a whole were participating less in Eunice's class, whatever (little) participation possibilities there were, the teacher apparently tried to ensure they were accessible to all, particularly to the children designated as having SEN. In that sense, it would seem that these specific children would have a more positive participation experience in a class like Eunice's than in a class like Lucia's. This supposition appears to be confirmed not only by the event-related results – as will be seen ahead – but also by the



appreciation of their participation that is made by children designated as having SEN which is, on average, better in cluster 2 than in 1 (BD32, cluster 1: 2.32; cluster 2: 3.08).

7.4.2. Event-related results and analysis

Table 7.5: Classroom level event-related results for Element 2 of the indicator set (Non-discrimination in the access to participation)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1				Cluster 2			
				Less participation-oriented				More participation-oriented			
				Filipa (Year 2)	Arthur (Year 2)	Lucia (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Nina (Year 1)	Ruth (Year 1)	Eunice (Year 3)	Clara (Year 4)
D16	Observable	Is the activity, by its nature, accessible to all children?	0-1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
				0.5				0.5			
D17	Observable	Are provisions taken to insure non-discrimination?	0-1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
				0.25				0.5			
D18	Observable	Do all children have a similar level of participation in the activity?	0-100 (a)	6.6	1.6	0	3	13.4	6.5	11.6	1.6
				2.8				8.3			
			0-100 (b)	21.8	26.1	28.6	27.3	18.8	20	20	9.5
				25.9				17.1			
			0-100 (c)	22.6	12.9	12.7	14.6	22.9	21.6	17.1	40.1
				15.7				25.4			
D19	Observable	Do teachers vary equitably whom they interact with?	0-100 (a)	6.4	2.8	2.1	4.9	10	7.8	18.7	2.25
				4				9.688			
			0-100 (b)	30.43	26.09	28.57	27.27	25	20	15	14.29
				28.09				18.573			
			0-100 (c)	14.1	10.6	10	8.8	17.3	21.2	19.5	29.7
				10.875				21.925			
D21	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN have the same seating arrangements as	0-1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
				0.75				0.75			
D22	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN remain in the classroom / with the rest of the group at all times?	0-1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
				0.75				0.75			
D23	Observable	Do the support teachers work with children, other than those designated as having SEN?	0-1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
				0.25				0.5			
D24	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN do the same work / work in the same subject as the rest of the class / group?	0-1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
				0.5				0.5			

As table 7.5 demonstrates, this is not one of the sections in which the differences between clusters are more pronounced: at first sight, it would even seem difficult to classify one cluster as more participation-oriented than the other. However, even if cluster 1 seems to perform better on indicators assessing non-discrimination on the basis of academic status (e.g. D18b, D19c), the predominance of positive results regarding



children designated as having SEN, present in cluster 2 (e.g. D18a, D19a) leads into classifying the latter as the more positive cluster. Still, with the exception of isolated cases, the situation is relatively positive in both clusters, with no major discrepancies being observed. This is quite curious if one considers that the background section was one in which results between clusters diverged the most (see table 7.4).

The most interesting feature of this section is perhaps the discrepancy between the background and the event-related indicators with regards to the classes that compose the two clusters: Nina's and Clara's classes are situated in the less participative cluster in what regards the background and in more participative when it comes to the events. Arthur's class, on the other hand, shows the opposite situation.

It can be said that Clara's class in this domain could almost stand on a category of its own. In fact, her class showed such odd values in indicators D18c and D19c, that these had to be eliminated as they disturbed the whole cluster structure rendering it invalid. And this was because one single child in this class, Dario, was responsible for more than 40% of the child-initiated interactions (D18c) and by almost 30% of the teacher-initiated ones (D19c). This fact is interesting in itself as it seems to indicate a problem in the variability of participation opportunities in Clara's class. However, that situation was so atypical, that it was not very helpful when trying to figure out patterns of participation or in cluster formation.

The case is different, however, when it comes to an apparent inversion of results between Nina's and Arthur's classes: it should be noticed that the majority of event-related indicators would put Arthur's class in the more participatory cluster and Nina's in the less participation-oriented one (D16, D17 as well as D21 to D24). This would

confirm the tendency observed in the background (table 7.4). The indicators that balance the result in the opposite sense are clearly those related with the observed variability in participation interactions (both child- and teacher-initiated), in which Arthur's class is outperformed by Nina's. On the one hand, it is true that Arthur's actions not seem to support his words, when it comes to providing the children with similar participation opportunities. On the other hand, however, the current results have to be confronted with the qualitative data as well as with the results from section 1: in fact, in Arthur's class, even if children designated as having SEN initiate less interactions and are the object of less teacher-initiated interactions, when these happen, they are generally of good quality (see e.g. U13, in table 7.3). In Nina's class, although the children designated as having SEN have more utterances and are the object of more interactions – it is the highest level of all classes – their nature is not very positive as these tend to be ignored or answered to in a negative manner by the teacher (e.g. as a reprehension).

These results are a reminder, therefore, of the prudence that is necessary in the interpretation of exclusively quantitative scores. Furthermore, they seem to indicate that the background is not deterministic in either direction: even when the environment is not very participation-oriented, participation still can be observed in practice (maybe in some specific moments or only for some specific children, but it does exist). Similarly, an apparently favourable background is not a guarantee that effective participation is actually taking place. This premise seems to strengthen the criticism pointed out to a certain current of the statutory view, which tends to mistake the existence of favourable legislation in the domain of child participation for its application in practice. It is the position of this thesis that neither the former – background results – nor the latter –



statutory dispositions – should ever be taken on their own as representative of children’s actual participation in any domain.

7.5. Element 3: Non-traditional conception of children and childhood

7.5.1. Background results and analysis

Table 7.6: Classroom level background results for Element 3 of the indicator set (Non-traditional conception of children and childhood)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1 Less participation-oriented				Cluster 2 More participation-oriented			
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Lucia (Year 3)	Clara (Year 4)
BN35	Teachers' perceptions	Are children portrayed beyond their role as learners?	0-1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
				0.5				1			
BN34	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general described in positive terms?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
				0				0.5			
BN36	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general described as competent / capable?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
BN37	Children's perceptions	Do children describe pupils as competent / capable?	0-1	1	1	1	0.25	1	0.5	1	1
				0.8				0.9			
BN38	Children's perceptions	Do children purport teachers' opinion about pupils as competent / capable subjects?	0-1	0.25	0.5	0.25	0	1	0.75	1	0.5
				0.25				0.8			
BN51	Teachers' perceptions	Is autonomy referred to as a value?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
BN52	Observable	Are children given meaningful 'responsibilities'?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
				0				0.5			
BN39	Teachers' perceptions	Are children portrayed as subjects of rights?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
				0				0.75			
BN41	Teachers' perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
				0				0.75			
BN43	Children's perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	0-1	N/A	0.5	N/A	0.5	N/A	1	0.25	1
BN44	Teachers' perceptions	Are children awarded attitudinal respect?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
				0				0.75			
BN49	Children's perceptions	Do children portray as unfair / incorrect for the teacher to tell pupils off?	0-1	0.75	1	0.25	0.25	0.75	0.75	1	1
				0.6				0.9			
BN46	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray their relationship with the children as non-hierarchical?	0-1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
				0.25				0.5			
BN48	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils- teachers relationships as non-hierarchical?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0.75	0.5	0.5	0.75
				0				0.6			
BN53	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers conceive learning mostly as fun?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
BN54	Teachers' perceptions	Are children portrayed as enjoying school?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
				0				0.75			



This section of the indicator set is perhaps one of the more closely dependent on adults' attitudes (in the sense conveyed by Pridmore, 2000, see chapter 4). It is, therefore, not surprising to realise that the indicators (table 7.6) in which the difference between the less and the more participation-oriented clusters is more important, are those pertaining to the teachers' attitudes towards children as learners (BN35) and as subjects of rights (BN39); as well as in the perceptions of them as autonomous (BN51) and competent beings (BN36). In fact, descriptions of children made by teachers in cluster 2 seem to be characterised by a strong emphasis on the children's capabilities, a belief in their capacities to evolve as human beings, and a portrait of involvement in their own learning. The following excerpts intend to provide examples of such view:

'[My pupils] were completely autonomous... they'd REGULATE their own learning process'.

(Ruth's interview, on 21/02/00)

'They are already able of doing research', 'they are: intervening (...) uninhibited, decided, willing to participate, willing to expose themselves, (...) eager to learn'; 'they show a great spirit of solidarity, a great desire to help, to make themselves available to others'; 'they want to grow up and be SOMEONE', 'they foresee imaginative professions... so they want to construct themselves as persons'; 'they are very happy when they learn something new', 'they're very talkative... but in the end that becomes an interesting feature because it is a class with very good participation. I don't have pupils that look amorphous, apathetic or alienated and unwilling to participate'.

(Arthur's interview, on 24/02/00)

On the other hand, descriptions emerging from cluster 1 seem to be hinged either on a more condescending perception (e.g. BN36, BN52) or on a positive perception of some children in particular, but not with regards to all of them. Another type of traditional conception, is that in which the focus is put on the comparison between 'nowadays' and



‘good-old-days’ children, with a clearly poorer appreciation of the former: ‘nowadays’ children are described, in the words of teachers sharing this view (cluster 1), as more ‘forgetful’, ‘aggressive’, ‘noisy’, ‘rude’; as ‘cheating’ more and having ‘more and more negative results’; as less ‘responsible’, less ‘interested’ and as ‘in need of constant surveillance’. Some of these teachers display, furthermore, a conception on the application of discipline and on corporal punishment, which would not be in line with the notion of respect owed to children under the non-traditional view. The lines that follow constitute, perhaps, the more far-reaching example found in the school of the aforementioned traditional conception on corporal punishment. Although it is a long excerpt, it is believed it was justified to purport it in such manner, for the rich insight and nuances it provides into that type of attitude. It will, therefore, be the object of a more detailed analysis.

‘[Filipa was elaborating on the issue of children’s participation on decision-making] Some things I decide by myself, but on other things I also ask them: ‘What do you think should happen in this very moment?’... Even yesterday I asked that to a pupil: [raises tone of voice] ‘*what do you think you deserved at this moment?*... Do you think I was unfair with you?’ – I ask these questions lots of times – ‘do you think I’m being mean to you? Do you think I’m being unfair with you?’ ... And they end up saying no... I don’t force them to... [hesitates] but they end up recognising that they were wrong...

I put myself in their shoes lots of times... And yesterday I did something to a pupil that... I shouldn’t have done... and afterwards... I realised *I shouldn’t have done what I did to the kid (...). I did the wrong thing because...* [interrupts] *it was at the end of the day... and I guess I was already extremely tired* and... instinctively... I got very angry at the fact that he didn’t want to work properly and was being lazy (...) It was with J., who doesn’t give me any behavioural problems. But he is a child who ... because of problems in the family (...) is very unstable (...) and in the days that he should pay more attention to what he’s doing... he gets lazy and does not do a thing!

And they had to do an orthography exercise: they had to copy a text... and then answer some questions (...) and I told him to correct some mistakes he had made... He went back to his seat; copied the questions; gave the answers; didn't even care about correcting (...) and some of the questions... he didn't even read them! And I realised perfectly that he was giving totally senseless answers... because he wasn't even reading the questions!

And you could ask me: 'but was he able to read? Was he able to answer?'... And I tell you: everything on that exercise he knew how to do... And so I told him off... and I pulled his earlobe... because he was trying to hide what he had done... [I told him] 'J., you didn't do ANYTHING of what I had told you! You will go back to your seat... and you will do what I told you, instead of playing the whole time'... *And I passed my hand through his face... but I was unlucky and my ring got caught on the... kid's nose. And it started bleeding. Some kids are more sensitive, it started bleeding.*

And I found it so hard to see the kid... bleeding from the nose... *Oh, I felt so bad, so bad, so bad...* Oh, Leonor, I was upset for the rest of the lesson, because I never thought that would happen to the kid... [I asked myself] 'why did I hit the kid?'... And on top of it, *it was bad luck that my ring got caught on this part of the nose [shows me]... and a little capillary vein burst...*

But I felt so bad to see the kid bleeding, that I showed him nothing but tenderness for the rest of the morning... because, after that, he ended up doing things correctly... I mean, in the end, it's hard to admit that sometimes we have to be... a little bit mean... and demanding; to be a little bit rough so that they get SCARED! *There are some children who, sometimes, will only function well under fear... It doesn't work any other way, for things to go well (...)* And he ended up being scared... *maybe of being hit AGAIN... or to see that I could be more aggressive with him, [that] he ended up doing everything correctly...*

And I asked him: Oh, J. why did I have to get mad at you? Couldn't you have done this right?

- 'Yes'

- 'So, why didn't you do it right in the first place?'

- 'I didn't feel like it...'

- 'And do you think it was necessary for me to [hesitates]... pass my hand through your nose; and you ending up bleeding from the nose; *I ended up being mean to you and couldn't YOU have avoided this?*'



- 'Yes'

- 'So, what did you deserve... in this situation? Do you think I was mean to you?'

- 'No'

- 'So, *who was to blame for this situation?*'

- 'It was me, teacher, because I should have done it right and I didn't...'

They have a great sense of justice, the children: a punishment, so to say, or a *little smack given at the RIGHT time, at the RIGHT moment... they don't think it's wrong... and it has never traumatised any child whatsoever* (...) when they see... and we make them see that they were wrong, that they did things wrongly, they end up accepting it (...).

And I ended up confronting him with the situation, because I think I was [interrupts]... *At this moment, the question is whether I overreacted or not; whether that situation was correct or not...* but the truth is that in the rest of the lesson he worked fine; he ended up seeing that my reaction had been his fault, because he could have worked better and he didn't...'

(Filipa's interview on 03/03/00, emphasis added)

There are several aspects of this account worth commenting. In order of appearance in the excerpt:

a) firstly, it is significant that the teacher provides this account as an example of children participating in decision-making. In fact, it could be said that Filipa demonstrates a very personal interpretation of that notion as it seems that 'consulting children' would inevitably and solely be linked with seeking their input regarding punishment to be instilled, e.g. 'what do you think you deserved at this moment?';

b) it is also quite interesting to follow the different steps in the teacher's reasoning with regards to having hit the child: she starts by confiding the belief that she had not proceeded appropriately (e.g. I shouldn't have done what I did to the kid) and that the situation probably occurred because 'it was at the end of the day... and I guess I was

already extremely tired'. The teacher admits that to herself and – partially – to the researcher. The admission to the researcher is deemed as partial because it is filled with euphemisms in the description of events: the teacher never says she hit the child, she just 'passed her hand through his face / nose'; the bleeding occurred because 'some kids are more sensitive' and 'a *little* capillary vein burst'; and it was just 'bad luck' that the ring got caught on the nose...

Still, the teacher mentions to the researcher her feeling 'bad' and sorry for what had happened. However, she does not let those perceptions pass on to the child: on the contrary, the pursuit described is one in which the child is gradually led to the admission of the entire culpability for the situation. That process is done in such way that her action, which Filipa classifies as inappropriate in the beginning, ends up being purported as self-justified by the end of the account. This apparent impossibility of an adult admitting wrong-doing before a child is believed to portray a very hierarchical conception of adult-child relationships.

c) there is also a stated belief in corporal punishment as a 'pedagogical tool' – e.g. 'there are some children who, sometimes, will only function well under fear... It doesn't work any other way, for things to go well' – which is necessarily against the principles of respect prescribed by a non-traditional conception of children. This is, furthermore, allied to the notion that such situations would be easily 'accepted' by children and not 'traumatising' to them, which can be seen as a (negatively) patronising stance, going against the principle of recognising children as fully sentient beings (Hart & Schwab, 1997).



Comparing the accounts provided for clusters 1 and 2, it should not be unexpected to find that the type of attitudinal discrepancies observed with regards to teachers' perceptions, is also present in the child-related indicators. It is interesting to notice, though, that the more salient differences are not between the children's perceptions of themselves (these are almost equivalent, BN37) but reside in the way they portray the adults' perceptions of children (BN38) and adult-child relationships (BN48).

### 7.5.2. Event-related results and analysis

Table 7.7: Classroom level event-related results for Element 3 of the indicator set (Non-traditional conception of children and childhood)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1				Cluster 2			
				Less participation-oriented				More participation-oriented			
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Lucia (Year 3)	Clara (Year 4)
N25	Observable	Are children given meaningful 'responsibilities' within	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
				0				0.5			
N26	Observable	Is the incidence of positive encouragement (a) higher than that of negative remarks (b)?	0-100 (a)	3	2.4	2.9	2.7	5.9	5.1	1.6	2.5
				2.8				3.8			
			0-100 (b)	10.9	9.9	6.8	5.5	4.2	1.9	8.3	4.3
				8.3				4.7			
N27	Observable	Are children enabled and encouraged to contribute their views on	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
N28	Observable	Do the teachers plunge into the common experience when	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
N29	Observable	Do teachers act upon suggestions of the children? (see annex 7 for specific items)	0-100 (ap)	6.7	3.9	1.2	2	3.4	5.8	0	13
				3.4				5.5			
			0-100 (an)	4	30.8	6	7	0	2.9	5.2	7.8
				11.9				4			
			0-100 (bp)	0	0	0	0	1.7	0	0	7.8
				0				2.4			
			0-100 (bn)	13.3	3.9	0	5	8.5	1.4	6.9	2.6
				5.5				4.9			
			0-100 (cp)	28	15.4	31.3	25	71.2	82.6	65.5	61
				24.9				70.1			
			0-100 (cn)	48	46.2	61.5	61	15.3	7.3	22.4	7.8
				54.2				13.2			
			0-100 (dp)	34.7	19.2	32.5	27	76.3	88.4	65.5	81.8
				28.4				78			
			0-100 (dn)	65.3	80.8	67.5	73	23.7	11.6	34.5	18.2
				71.6				22			
N30	Observable	Does humour have an incidence in the activity?	0-100	0.3	0	0.9	1.9	1.7	0.8	0.6	1
				0.8				1			

Once again, the event-related results (table 7.7) seem to cluster along two very clear axes, which coincide with those observed in the background. The current results allow for the identification of two important elements that may help differentiate events related to a non-traditional approach from a more traditional one. The first one concerns the comparison between the incidence of positive encouragement and that of negative remarks (N26), whereas the second one regards the response given to children's spontaneous and/ or solicited utterances (N27 to N29).

As to the former, a more non-traditional approach could be characterised as one in which great trust is put in the children's abilities (Holden & Clough, 1998) and, therefore, the appreciation of their performance tends to be more positive than negative. Table 7.7 shows that, in this school, there are only two classes – Ruth's and Arthur's – in which there is more positive encouragement than negative remarks being fed back to the children (N26A compared to N26B). As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the cases where the incidence of negative remarks is systematically higher, one can only speculate what impact that can have in the classroom's environment and in the children's motivation. Furthermore, it should be noted that, in two of the classes – Nina's and Filipa's – the incidence of negative remarks amounts to virtually 10% of all the teacher-initiated interactions (N26B); a percentage that can, by all means, be considered as very high.

The other point has to do with the type of response present following a child's intervention. Within a more non-traditional approach (cluster 2), due to a conception of respect owed to them, children's suggestions would systematically be judged worthy of, at least, being listened to (N27) and, whenever possible, acted upon (N29) or integrated into the lesson (N28). This could be mainly because children are perceived as capable



beings with pertinent thoughts to be explored (Wood, 1998). Even if a child's intervention is not appropriate at a certain moment (e.g. for being unrelated to the topic being discussed), within the non-traditional approach reflected in cluster 2, the teacher will generally respond to children's suggestions in a positive manner; one that values children as capable members of the class and intends to keep them motivated into continuing to make contributions (N27).

A caveat should, nonetheless, be made: while keeping an accepting attitude, it would seem important to maintain this acceptance under control for the good functioning of the lesson. The latter aspect did not seem to be present, for example, in Clara's class; an instance which created the need to eliminate two event-related indicators in section 7.4. (see table 7.5, indicators D18C and D19C). In fact, by accepting the majority of pupil Dario's suggestions and thoughts right at the moment when he proffered them, Clara's interactions were concentrated on this single pupil to a level that made her less available to the rest of the class. A good example of an intervention that attends to both considerations, i.e. providing a supportive response while maintaining the flow of the lesson, could be the following:

[Context: an Environmental and Social Studies lesson in which the teacher was presenting the order of the planets in the solar system. Pupil A. says she knows by heart the definition of 'star']

Lucia - No, A. we're not talking about the stars right now. But hold on to that thought because it will be useful for the end of the lesson, ok?

(Lucia's class, year 3, on 15/06/00)

In a similar situation, the more traditional approach present in cluster 1, would generally seem to involve the teacher either ignoring the comment or feeding back a negative remark, which was sometimes quite depreciatory or belittling to the child:

[Context: an Environmental and Social Studies lesson in which the teacher was explaining the characteristics of wood. Pupil J.P. says he brought the potato the teacher had asked for, in order to make 'potato stamps']

Nina - Why do you insist on that? Can't you see we're talking about something else? You never pay attention to what goes on in class...

(Nina's class, year 1, on 27/03/00)

This is an aspect where the clusters' results are markedly different. As it had happened with regards to the general exercise of participation (see table 7.3), if the total values are considered, there is almost a perfect asymmetry between the clusters: while the more participation-oriented presents almost 80% of positive responses (N29dp), the less participation-oriented one portrays more than 70% of negative scores (N29dn).

## **7.6. Element 4: Participation being beneficial for children**

### **7.6.1. Background results and analysis**

As mentioned before, this aspect of the 'inalienable right' view on participation is quite difficult to assess due to the dangers of presuming causal relations in this domain. That said, there are some aspects of the current results (table 7.8) which are worth commenting on.



Table 7.8: Classroom level background results for Element 4 of the indicator set  
(Participation being beneficial for children)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1	Cluster 2						
				Less participation-oriented	More participation-oriented						
				Nina (Year1)	Ruth (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Arthur (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Lucia (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Clara (Year 4)
BP55	Teachers' perceptions	Is participation perceived as a good educational tool?	0-1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
				0	1						
BP56	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers consider that there are specific benefits for children deriving from participation?	0-1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
				0	1						
BP57	Children's perceptions	Is one's perception of participation co-related with one's perception of other skills?	0-1	0	1 part corr acad (.9, p< 0.001)	1 part corr acad (.62, p= 0.002)	1 part corr acad (.73, p< 0.001)	0	0	0	0
				0	0.44						

In what concerns the attitudes of the teachers (BP55, BP56), the tendency for almost unanimously positive results, which had been verified at the school level (chapter 6), seems to be confirmed at this level by the disproportion in the number of classes composing each cluster (cluster 1: 1 class; cluster 2: 7 classes). Again, the influence of a social desirability factor can be presumed in explaining these results.

More interesting seems to be the fact that, in three of the classes, the results of the children's 'participation perception' scale showed a significant positive correlation with those of 'academic self-perception' (BP57). In fact, at least with regards to those three classes, these results can complement those presented in section 7.4. of this chapter, with regards to a possible link between academic status and participation; i.e. it would seem that those designated – by themselves and/or the teachers – as 'good' pupils would demonstrate a higher level of participation than the rest of the class and vice-versa.



7.7. Element 5: Development of democracy and citizenship

7.7.1. Background results and analysis:

Table 7.9: Classroom level background results for Element 5 of the indicator set (Development of democracy and citizenship)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1				Cluster 2			
				Less participation-oriented				More participation-oriented			
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Lucia (Year 3)	Clara (Year 4)
BDC64	Children's perceptions	Do children portray the head as having democracy and citizenship as personal	0-1	0	0.25	0.25	0	0.75	0	0.25	0.75
				0.1				0.4			
BDC65	Children's perceptions	Do children portray a democratically run school?	0-1	0	0.5	0.75	0	0.75	0.75	0.25	0.75
				0.3				0.6			
BDC66	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers refer to democracy and citizenship as personal concerns?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
BDC78	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers envision the school as adequate to children's needs / as a locus	0-1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
				0.25				0.75			
BDC79	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers consider themselves as transmitters of values?	0-1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0.25				1			
BDC68	Teachers' perceptions	Are democracy / rights seen as values to be taught?	0-1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
				0.5				1			
BDC69	Teachers' perceptions	Are democracy / rights seen as a values to be lived?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0				1			
BDC67	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers perceive children as capable of undertaking democratic	0-1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
				0.75				0.75			
BDC70	Teachers' perceptions	Are children considered as citizens in the present?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
				0				0.25			
BDC71	Observable & documentary	Are there democratic processes in which children take part?	0-1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
				0.5				0.75			
BDC72	Observable	Are there democratic structures in which children take part?	0-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
				0				0.5			
BDC74	Observable	Are there channels of bottom-up communication?	0-1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
				0.25				0.5			
BDC75	Children's perceptions	Do children propose democratic solutions for decision making?	0-1	0	0.5	0.75	0.5	1	1	0.25	0.5
				0.4				0.7			
BDC76	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils as taking part in democratic processes?	0-1	0	0	0.25	0.25	1	1	0.5	0.75
				0.1				0.8			
BDC77	Children's perceptions	Do children demonstrate knowledge of 'Convention-like' rights?	0-1	N/A	0.75	N/A	0.75	N/A	0.75	0.25	0.75

Table 7.9 demonstrates that, yet again, this is an issue that divides the classes into two distinct groups. In this particular case, they seem to cluster along three different aspects: a) the teachers' attitudes; b) the existence of processes and structures; c) the children's perceptions – especially in relation with b).



a) the focal point of divergence between the teachers in clusters 1 and 2, seems to be less related to a perception of incapability to undertake democratic processes – either their own (BDC68) or the children’s (BDC67) – than to a conviction of their appropriateness with regards to everyday class management. In fact, while most teachers state finding appropriate to teach them to children (BDC68), only those in cluster 2 consider that democratic processes should actually be lived by children in their daily school experience (BDC69).

Interestingly, these results mirror precisely those in indicator BDC66 – pertaining to whether teachers mention democracy and citizenship as personal concerns – and reproduce almost exactly those of indicator BDC79 – which assesses perceptions on the role of teachers as transmitters of values. The combination of these results appears to indicate that conceiving democracy as something to be lived by children would imply a stronger commitment to such values. This interpretation is also corroborated by the next point regarding this aspect.

b) With regards to the existence of processes and structures, the difference between clusters is not clear-cut in all indicators: it seems nonetheless that it is more common for classes to have occasional acts of democracy (BDC71) – e.g. voting for someone to perform a task – than installed structures functioning in a democratic fashion (BDC72) – e.g. a class assembly. Therefore, the latter can be presumed to represent a more advanced stage in the conception of democratic and citizenship rights, as it is accompanied by the presumption of a more consistent exercise. The fact that this type of functioning is exclusive to two classes in cluster 2 appears to support this explanation. Still, it seems interesting to appreciate how that is translated into practice. To provide an

illustration of those structures in action and of children's participation in democratic procedures, which is more characteristic of cluster 2, an excerpt of a pupil assembly in one of such classes will be used. This example pertains to teacher Arthur's year 2 class:

*Arthur* I have something to say about the Individual Work Plan (IWP): I'd like to know who left many activities undone?

(...)

[After some discussion, they came to the conclusion that the most unfulfilled activity was 'plasticine moulding']

*Arthur* I'd like to have your opinion as to why so many people did not work with plasticine...

*Joel* I think it's because all the colours are mixed up... and you can't work properly.

*Rebeca* I think it's because it's mixed up and also that they chose too many things in the IWP.

*Micaela* And then they didn't have the time for the plasticine.

*Arthur* I guess Micaela is right... I guess sometimes you choose too many activities... but maybe we could also award more time in our lessons' schedule for plasticine and other games. What do you think?

*Rebeca* I think that would be a good idea... it'd give us more time for everything.

*Paulo* Yes, but we don't like very much to play with it [plasticine] because it's all mixed up.

*Cecilia* Maybe we should buy some new one with the money the parents gave you.

*Rafael* But we were saving that to buy a new football!

*Natacha* I don't think we should spend that in plasticine!

*Joel* We should buy the new plasticine but... just a few packs...

*Paula* But maybe we could still use the one we have if we separate [the different colours].

*Arthur* So how do you suggest we do that?

*Paula* Well, perhaps we could stay over a little during the break and separate it into different colour balls.

*Joel* But buying new one would be much better!



*Arthur* Ok, Ok, we have two different ideas here... We'll have to vote: Who votes to stay in and separate the colours?

[Some children raise their hands]

*Arthur* And who votes on buying new plasticine?

[Some children raise their hands]

*Martim* [who was the 'president' for the current class assembly, counts the votes] the first one won: we'll stay in and separate.

*Arthur* Ok, then. This issue is solved. Let's move on to the next point in the agenda.

(Arthur's class, year 2, Class Assembly on 31/03/00)

It must be recognised that the issue under discussion – the plasticine – may not necessarily seem of great importance. In fact, what is interesting about it is less the subject itself, but the discussion it creates and the possibilities it allows for children's democratic participation. If not, an analysis of the excerpt under this lens should bring forth such aspects:

- *a problem is presented*: many people are not working with plasticine when they had planned to do it;
- *it is the children who analyse the origin of the problem*: 'they didn't have the time', 'the colours are mixed up';
- *they propose different solutions*: 'buying more', 'separating the existing one';
- *they debate the pros and cons of each solution and foresee the possible results*: spending money and not having enough for the football, staying in and losing part of the recreation time;
- and, finally, *they have a vote on the solution*, which becomes the agreed way of solving the problem.

It can be supposed that, in a less democratic class, the problem would probably not even have been judged worthy of discussion in the first place and the teacher might have never understood why children were not using the plasticine. This is because, in the

current situation, they were the only ones to know the origin of the problem. Their fine knowledge regarding their own situation has, indeed, been mentioned in the literature as a good argument to support children's participation (Gersch, 1987; Pridmore, 2000; Lansdown, 2001).

Furthermore, the children's logical reasoning and the discussion capabilities they portray might not be expressed in a less participatory class, as clearly as they are in the excerpt above. In fact, according to the 'inalienable right' view, without this type of exercise, not only the solutions found might not be as adequate, but also many valuable learning opportunities may be lost.

c) the way children perceive these processes seems to be related to the presence of such processes in their classes, as they portray systematically a more positive picture than the children of classes where they are absent (BDC64, BDC65). It could be ventured that the more familiarised children are with such processes and structures, the more skilled they will be in presenting democratic solutions (BDC75) and integrating those values as their own (BDC76). This proposal is, indeed, in line with a certain trend in the literature (e.g. Nader, 1992; Ukpokodu, 1997) and would certainly constitute an interesting topic for further research in this domain.



7.7.2. Event-related results and analysis

Table 7.10: Classroom level event-related results for Element 5 of the indicator set (Development of democracy and citizenship)

				Cluster 1					Cluster 2		
				Less participation-oriented					More participation-oriented		
Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Lucia (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Clara (Year 4)
DC33	Observable	Is there explicit teaching and learning about democratic processes and	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0					1		
DC34	Observable	When children are chosen to participate in the activity, is representativeness an	0-1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
				0.4					0.7		
DC35	Observable	Are roles clearly distributed and discussed?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0					1		
DC36	Observable	Do children have the right non-participation if they wish?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
				0					0		

Table 7.10 portrays a cluster constitution which is almost equivalent to that of the background section (see table 7.9): the only discrepancy is that of Lucia’s class, which is positioned in the more participation-oriented cluster with regards to the background and in the less participatory one in what concern the events observed. This disparity might contribute to confirm the proposal that this is, indeed, one of the most demanding elements of the ‘inalienable right’ view on the right to participation and, therefore, one in which it might be difficult to co-ordinate practice with discourse. This affirmation finds further support in the fact that, even with regards to the background, Lucia’s class’ positive results were much more concentrated in the ‘teacher’s attitudes’ indicators than in the ones pertaining to the ‘existence of democratic processes and structures’ (see table 7.9).

In what concerns the differentiation between the clusters, it appears to reside in specific aspects of the interactions being considered: it is interesting to notice, for instance, that although most teachers had mentioned considering important to, at least, teach children about democracy and citizenship (table 7.9, BDC68), only those in cluster 2 effectively did so during the lessons observed (DC33). Furthermore, only in cluster 2 were the roles

for the different activities clearly discussed with children prior to their distribution; in cluster 1, these were primarily assigned by the teachers (DC35).

Finally, it should be noticed that in no occasion, in any of the classes, were the children able to opt out of an activity if they so wished (DC36). All the activities observed had a compulsory nature. Still, in most classes in cluster 2, although the right to non-participation was not awarded to children, in many occasions there was a choice of activities which allowed them – to some extent – to determine the content of that participation. This issue will be further explored in the following section.

## **7.8. Element 6: Participation as a powersharing issue**

### **7.8.1. Background results and analysis**

The current section pertains also to one of the most ‘demanding’ elements of the ‘inalienable right’ view. Although intimately related with ‘non-traditional’ and ‘democracy and citizenship’ elements, it goes a step farther as it previews the existence of a certain equity between children’s and adults’ roles. It is, therefore, one of the sections which could best be used to detect and characterise a more profoundly participation-oriented ethos.

It is also one of the elements where it would be legitimate to expect a certain influence of the ‘age’ factor, i.e. where older children would enjoy more rights on the basis of their maturity. However, according to the results in table 7.11, that influence appears not to be verified in this school because the more participatory cluster is formed by one class of each year (including two classes in the younger years): the results do not seem, therefore, to be organised along an ‘age’ axis.



Table 7.11: Classroom level background results for Element 6 of the indicator set  
(Participation as a powersharing issue)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1					Cluster 2		
				Less participation-oriented					More participation-oriented		
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Lucia (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Clara (Year 4)
BPW82	Observable	Are there processes in which children have the same power as adults?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0					1		
BPW83	Observable	Are children informed about the programme?	0-1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0.2					1		
BPW84	Observable	Are there work programmes / plans (individual / collective) defined by the pupils?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
				0					0.7		
BPW85	Observable	Do children treat the head in an informal way?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
				0					0.7		
BPW86	Observable	Do children treat the teacher in an informal way?	0-1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
				0.4					1		
BPW88	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers express a positive view on being criticised by the pupils?	0-1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
				0.2					1		
BPW89	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers mention questioning themselves?	0-1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
				0.6					1		
BPW90	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers mention learning from the children too?	0-1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0.2					1		
BPW92	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers describe themselves as facilitators / moderators?	0-1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0.2					1		
BPW93	Children's perceptions	Do children portray teachers as facilitators / moderators?	0-1	0	0	0.25	0.75	0	0.75	0.75	0.75
				0.2					0.75		
BPW96	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils in power-sharing situations in equality with the teachers?	0-1	0	0	0	0.75	0	0.75	0.5	0.5
				0.2					0.6		
BPW61	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils as having an influence upon the organisation and content of	0-1	0	0	0.75	0.75	0	1	0.75	1
				0.3					0.9		
BPW94	Children's perceptions	Do children portray the teacher as providing pupils with choices?	0-1	0	0	0.75	0.75	0.25	1	1	0.75
				0.4					0.9		

On the other hand, the gap between clusters in what concerns the teachers' perceptions (BPW88 to BPW92) is very wide, which would tend to confirm the affirmation above with regards to the 'powersharing' element holding great discriminatory power.

There was, however, an interesting aspect of teachers' perceptions, which was mentioned exclusively – albeit consistently – by the teachers in cluster 2, concerning their conception of 'powersharing'. According to the results, these were supposed to be the teachers holding the most liberal view on the subject. Yet in a somewhat confessional manner, they admitted to, when presenting different activities to the

children as options, sometimes subtly ‘influencing’, ‘orienting’ or ‘guiding’ children in those choices.

If taken at the first level of interpretation, this admission might seem confusing as it would seem more characteristic of the aforementioned ‘illusory’ participation, rather than of ‘genuine’ one (Alderson, 1999). There are, however, several aspects that need to be taken under consideration: if a ‘guided’ choice were the sole form of participation available to children, then their participation rights would seem to be somewhat limited. However, if there are other occasions where children make genuine choices (BPW82, BPW84), then a guided participation becomes just one more form that participation can assume. Moreover, the explanation given by the teachers to justify their actions was intimately related to their conception of their own role as facilitators of learning (BPW92): they stated that they could not dismiss themselves from their role as educators, assessing children’s educational needs and orienting them into the choice of activity or subject they believed was more appropriate for that child at a given moment.

It is also a view in which children do go through a process of choice, instead of just being assigned an activity. The fact that, in these specific circumstances, adults orient them in that process, would seem, therefore, more related with a ‘granted’ view of participation rights, than with an ‘illusion’ of participation.

Coincidentally, the children’s perceptions can also be taken as a reflection of the situation portrayed by the teachers. Children in cluster 2 classes tend to view their teachers more as facilitators (BPW93), as providing them with choices (BPW94) and portray pupils as having an influence upon the learning situation (BPW61) to a higher level than those in cluster 1 classes.



7.8.2. Event-related results and analysis

Table 7.12: Classroom level event-related results for Element 6 of the indicator set  
(Participation as a powersharing issue)

Code	Type of indicator	What to know?	Scale	Cluster 1					Cluster 2	Cluster 3	
				Less participation-oriented					Intermediate	More p.-oriented	
				Nina (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Lucia (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Ruth (Year 1)	Arthur (Year 2)	Clara (Year 4)
PW39	Observable	Are children informed about the programme of the activity?	0-1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0.2					1	1	
PW40	Observable	Are there work programmes / plan (individual / collective) defined by the pupils for the activity?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
				0					1	0.5	
PW38	Observable	Are children's complaints taken seriously?	0-1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
				0.2					1	0.5	
PW41	Observable	Is there non-directive teaching?	0-100	3.1	6	0.3	2.3	0.9	10.3	2.3	1.5
				2.5					10.3	1.9	
PW8	Observable	Does the activity involve children making choices?	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
				0					1	1	
PW42	Observable	Does the action stem from joint discussion? a) discussion; b) order	0-100 (ap)	8.4	6.6	3.3	4.2	3.1	11.7	4.2	3.1
				5.1					11.7	3.7	
			0-100 (bn)	9.9	13.1	6.8	8.5	7.2	12.2	14.3	6.3
				7.1					12.2	20.6	
PW43	Observable	Does the activity involve more 'consultation – expression of opinion' (a) sequences than 'question – answer' sequences (b)?	0-100 (aq)	15.1	8.5	25.2	35.2	34.2	22.8	7.1	12.6
				23.6					22.8	9.8	
			0-100 (bc)	16.9	10.4	15.9	12.3	15	18.1	22.3	29.5
				14.1					18.1	25.9	

This was the hardest set of data to analyse. A quick cluster analysis performed in a similar way to the other sections did not produce conclusive results, as it was impossible to determine which of the two resulting clusters was more participation-oriented. It was then decided to exclude from the analysis two sub-indicators (PW42b, PW43a), which can be considered as only complementing the sub-indicator they had been coupled with. Although interesting, they were not considered as fundamental for the determination of this section’s overall results and they seemed to be damaging the clarity of the analysis. Another two-cluster analysis was then performed. The results were now more clear in terms of establishing a more and a less participation-oriented cluster, but this analysis did not yet reveal itself as discriminative as desired. This led to the decision of performing a three-cluster analysis in order to obtain a greater level of



discrimination. The results presented in table 7.12 emerged from that analysis and will now be examined in further detail.

They revealed a more participatory cluster (cluster 3) composed of Arthur's and Clara's classes, followed by Ruth's class, with intermediate results (cluster 2), and then by the other four classes, which presented less participation-oriented results (cluster 1). These results seem to be consistent with the background section, as Ruth's class results approximate those of the more participatory cluster.

Indeed, with regards to the majority of observable indicators (PW8 and PW38 to PW40) the results of clusters 2 and 3 are almost systematically opposite to those in cluster 1. On the other hand cluster 3, although being classified as more participation-oriented due to its overall results, presents less positive results when the issue of joint discussion prior to the occurrence of an action is considered (PW42). This fact seems to corroborate the proposition of the more demanding nature of the 'powersharing' element. This is, nevertheless, compensated by higher values with regards to children being consulted and expressing their opinion during the activity (PW43).



## 7.9.Conclusion

In the introduction of this chapter, two main objectives were set out. The first one was trying to characterise and distinguish less and more participation-oriented environments; and the second was exploring the hypotheses formulated in chapter 6 with regards to the factors that influence those different levels of participation. If the former has been attended to and occupied this chapters' previous sections, the latter – although alluded to in several occasions – has not yet been fully explored. It will, therefore, constitute the object of the current section.

It should be recalled that two hypotheses were being considered in this chapter in what concerns the factors influencing participation:

a) if the children's age is a determining factor in the children's exercise of participation, when a cluster analysis is performed on the results of each class, it will be expected that clusters will be formed around age groups;

b) if adults' ideology and attitudes towards participation are a determining factor in the children's exercise of that participation, when a cluster analysis is performed on the results of each class, it will be expected that clusters will be formed around the similarity of teachers' attitudes.

In the results presented in this chapter with regards to the different elements of the 'inalienable right' view, there was little indication of hypothesis a) being confirmed. In what concerns hypothesis b), however, there were several instances in which it appeared to be verified (e.g. 'universality of the right and its exercise'; 'non-traditional conception'). Still, it is judged that, for a better appreciation of the influence of the factors under consideration – i.e. the children's age and the teacher's attitudes – it

would be necessary to isolate and compare each of them with different aspects of child participation. The rationale behind this judgement was that the closer the relationship observed, the higher the level of influence of each factor.

Therefore, the data regarding the eight classes were grouped according to the criteria judged pertinent for the establishment of the type of comparison intended. Again, a K-means cluster analysis was performed to determine more and less participation-oriented clusters. The two factors under study were isolated and also analysed using the above-mentioned technique (with regards to the ‘age’ factor, the ‘+’ sign indicates the older children and the ‘-’ sign pertains to the younger ones). The results of these analyses are presented in table 7.13.

Table 7.13: Comparative cluster analysis of different aspects of the indicator set

Factors / Groupings of Indicators	Nina (Year 1)	Ruth (Year 1)	Filipa (Year 2)	Arthur (Year 2)	Eunice (Year 3)	Lucia (Year 3)	Laura (Year 4)	Clara (Year 4)
Children's age	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
Teachers-related	-	+	-	+	-	- *	-	+
Children-related	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Observable	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
Children-related + Observable	-	+	-	+	-	- *	-	+
Overall background	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Overall event-related	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+

\* In a three cluster analysis, this class was classified as intermediate.

As it can be appreciated in table 7.13, a close relationship cannot be established between the ‘age’ factor and the results of the different groupings of indicators. These seem, however, to mirror quite closely those observed with regards to teachers’ perceptions. It would appear, therefore, that the teachers’ attitudes towards participation are a determining factor for children’s exercise of that participation.

The implications of these findings, as well as their importance with regards to existing literature trends, will be considered in the Discussion (chapter 9). For the moment, this



thesis will pursue to examine the third hypothesis that had been proposed in chapter 6: that children's personal characteristics – such as 'being designated as having SEN' and 'academic status' – are also factors that influence participation. For that purpose, the children's individual results will have to be considered. That analysis will constitute the object of the following chapter.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Results and analysis at the individual level**

#### **8.1. Introduction**

The main purpose of this chapter is to further the investigation of the hypotheses presented in the preceding chapters, only now at the individual level. At this level, the hypotheses formulated are operationalised as follows:

- a) If the children's age is a determining factor in their participation, then it will be expected that the children's results will cluster along age lines, with the older children presenting higher scores than the younger ones.
- b) If adults' ideology is a determining factor in children's participation, then it will be expected that the children's results will cluster around class belonging, with children in classes whose teachers expressed more positive attitudes towards participation presenting higher scores than children in classes whose teachers expressed less positive attitudes.
- c) If personal characteristics – being designated as having SEN and academic status – are determining factors, then it will be expected that the children's results will cluster along those characteristics, with the children designated as having SEN and the pupils with lower academic status presenting more negative scores than their peers.

Particular attention will be dedicated to the hypothesis pertaining to the influence of personal characteristics (c), as this aspect has not yet been fully approached in the previous chapters. The presentation and analysis of results that follows will, therefore, explore both this and the above-mentioned hypotheses.



The chapter focuses on the individual results obtained by the 32 children described in chapter 5. Two main aspects are assessed (please refer to annex 7 for a list of the indicators used): a) their perceptions of participation (background results); b) their actual participation in class (event-related results). It should, nonetheless, be mentioned that this produced a very large amount of results as, at the individual level, each indicator had to be assessed 32 times – in comparison with 1 time for the school level and 8 times for the classroom level. It would thus be impossible to present the results in the same format as that of chapters 6 and 7. For that reason, a different type of presentation of results was devised for this particular instance:

As chapter 7, all the results were analysed using a K-means cluster analysis (for a more detailed description of the procedure followed see Appendix 8). This time, however, four clusters were formed:

The highest-ranking cluster, i.e. the first quartile is represented by the ++ symbol;

The second quartile by the + symbol;

The third quartile by the - symbol;

The fourth quartile and lowest ranking cluster by the -- symbol.

A four-cluster analysis was deemed more appropriate for this level because, on the one hand, it allowed a higher degree of discrimination between the results and, on the other hand, because it was consistent with the quartile organisation used to select the children according to their results in the perception of participation scale (see chapter 5). The results obtained through this method constitute the subject of the following section.

## **8.2. Overall results**



Table 8.1: Results at the individual level

Year	Class	Children	BU	U	BD	D	BN	N	BP	P	BDC	BPW	PW
1	Nina	Adriana	--	--	++	--	-	--	-	+	--	--	--
		Angelo	--	-	++	+	+	++	++	++	--	--	++
		Nelson	--	-	++	+	+	-	--	+	++	--	++
		Tomas	--	-	++	++	+	+	-	+	++	--	++
1	Ruth	Antonio	++	--	++	--	-	--	+	+	++	++	--
		Alex	++	--	++	-	+	++	++	++	++	++	++
		Maria	+	--	++	--	+	++	++	-	-	++	--
		Barbara	+	--	++	--	-	++	++	++	++	++	--
2	Filipa	Marcia	--	--	--	+	--	+	+	+	--	--	--
		Camila	--	--	--	+	--	+	--	+	+	--	--
		Rosa	-	--	--	-	--	+	++	--	++	--	--
		Cristina	-	++	--	++	+	-	+	+	++	++	++
2	Arthur	Matilde	-	--	++	+	--	++	++	++	++	++	++
		Joel	+	-	-	++	-	++	++	++	++	++	++
		Natacha	+	--	++	--	-	++	++	-	+	++	--
		Edgar	+	--	++	+	++	-	+	+	++	++	++
3	Eunice	Isabel	-	--	++	-	--	+	+	+	-	+	--
		Alexandra	-	--	++	-	--	++	++	++	--	--	--
		Jaime	-	--	++	+	--	+	+	-	--	+	--
		Lucas	++	-	++	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-
3	Lucia	Marina	-	--	-	+	--	++	+	++	++	++	--
		David	-	--	-	+	--	++	++	+	++	++	-
		Tania	-	--	+	-	--	+	++	+	++	-	++
		Julio	+	--	-	-	--	-	--	--	++	++	--
4	Laura	Samuel	-	--	+	-	--	++	++	++	--	--	++
		Monica	--	--	--	-	--	+	--	-	--	--	--
		Jorge	-	--	+	-	+	++	--	+	+	--	-
		Carla	-	+	--	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
4	Clara	Mario	-	--	--	+	--	++	++	++	+	++	--
		Silvia	-	--	+	+	--	+	++	+	++	+	--
		Sonia	++	--	+	+	--	+	++	-	++	++	++
		Claudia	-	--	+	-	--	+	--	--	-	--	--
Overall results' summary	--	7 (21.9%)	25 (78.1%)	8 (25%)	14 (43.8%)	3 (9.4%)	24 (75%)	3 (9.4%)	3 (9.4%)	12 (37.5%)	12 (37.5%)	18 (56.3%)	
	-	15 (46.9%)	5 (15.6%)	4 (12.5%)	9 (28.1%)	12 (37.5%)	3 (9.4%)	8 (25%)	7 (21.9%)	5 (15.6%)	2 (6.3%)	3 (9.4%)	
	+	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.1%)	5 (15.6%)	7 (21.9%)	15 (46.9%)	4 (12.5%)	10 (31.3%)	14 (43.8%)	2 (6.3%)	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.13%)	
	++	4 (12.5%)	1 (3.1%)	15 (46.9%)	2 (6.3%)	2 (6.3%)	1 (3.1%)	11 (34.4%)	8 (25%)	13 (40.6%)	12 (37.5%)	10 (31.3%)	
Overall less part.-oriented	- (-/-)	68.8%	93.8%	37.5%	71.9%	46.9%	84%	34.4%	31.3%	53.1%	43.8%	65.6%	
	+(+/+)	31.2%	6.2%	62.5%	28.1%	53.1%	15.62%	65.6%	68.7%	46.9%	56.3%	34.4%	

Overall cluster mode	Overall mode +/++ (+) -/- (-)	Background mode	Event-related mode	Participation scale quartile	Social percept. cluster	Academic status
--	-	--	--	--	-	+
+/++	+	--	++	-	-	--*
--/-	-	--	+/++	+	-	++
--/+	+	--	+/++	++	-	--*
--/++	+	++	--	--	-	+
++	+	++	--/++	-	+	+
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As it can be appreciated, this type of presentation (table 8.1) attempts to summarise the results obtained. It is believed to be useful as it allows three simultaneous analyses:

- a) regarding the 32 children's overall results (vertical columns and 'overall results summary');
- b) regarding the results class by class (blocks of four successive children);
- c) regarding the results of any given child (horizontal lines).

Due to its encompassing nature, this table will be called upon to illustrate different points of the discussion within the current chapter. As it can be noticed, in addition to the actual results, seven other columns are presented. They include mostly aggregated results and are intended both to facilitate and complement the analysis:

**Overall cluster mode:** refers to the most frequent cluster observed within the totality of a given child's results. It is intended to provide a summarised characterisation of that child's overall scores. On some occasions, two different clusters had the same frequency and both have been indicated. This can be a very interesting element to explore, for it might indicate a duality with regards to certain aspects of the children's participation, especially when one cluster is more positive (++ or +) and the other more negative (-- or -).

**Overall mode:** this is an aggregated result. It represents the most frequent tendency within a child's results. When a majority of more positive (++ and +) clusters was observed, a + sign was awarded; when a majority of more negative (-- and -) clusters was observed, a - sign was attributed. This helps eliminate the cases where two clusters shared the same frequency and concentrate only on what was the most frequent type of cluster, i.e. either more positive or more negative.

**Background and event-related mode:** similar to the 'overall cluster mode' analysis, it pertains to the most frequent clusters in each of the respective sections (background or

event-related) and intends to portray the existence of consistency or discrepancy between them.

**Participation scale quartile:** regards the quartile each child was classified in, according to the results of their ‘perception of participation’ scale. These quartiles follow a similar symbolic representation to the clusters’:

The ++ sign represents the highest level of perceived participation (first quartile);

The + sign represents the second quartile;

The - sign represents the third quartile;

And the lowest level of perceived participation is represented by the – sign (fourth quartile).

It should be recalled that the children now being considered were elected by their peers from within each of the classes’ quartile groups, as described in chapter 5.

**Social acceptance perception cluster:** refers to the cluster each child was positioned in with regards to the results of their ‘perception of social acceptance’ scale (Harter, 1985; Harter & Pike, 1984). It was deemed interesting to include these data as a complement to the ‘personal characteristics’ factor, owing to the fact that this scale can be taken as an indication of a child’s shyness or of an outgoing disposition (Harter, 1999). Therefore, it was judged appropriate to compare the results of this scale with those of children’s participation, in order to comment, albeit with reservations, on a possible link between the two.

**Academic status:** this element was defined by each of the teachers and is meant to help explore the potential influence of a child’s ‘academic status’ with regards to participation:

The ++ symbol stands for ‘high academic status’;

The + symbol stands for ‘higher average’;

The - symbol for ‘lower average’;

And the -- for ‘low academic status’.



Having explained the content of table 8.1, this presentation will now proceed to the analysis of the overall results.

### **8.3. Analysis of overall results**

Regarding the analysis of the different elements (vertical columns and ‘total overall results’ section in table 8.1), at first glance an interesting pattern seems to emerge: in fact, it appears that the majority of background elements present mostly positive results while most event-related ones demonstrate more negative scores.

However, the distribution of results varies along the different elements: In what concerns the ‘universality of the right and its exercise’ both background (BU) and event-related (U) indicators present more negative results. In fact, in the case of the event-related indicators (U), the results are virtually entirely negative [i.e. aggregated results of -- (71.8%) and - (15.%) = total 93.8% of negative results]. It is interesting to compare these results with those obtained from previous levels. Indeed the background (BU) was one of the sections where both the school and the classes scored generally positive results (see chapters 6 and 7). However, in the present case, the children categorise it mostly in a negative way. Perhaps this can be better understood if it is noted that the background data (BU) at this level are almost solely composed of the children’s perceptions. In fact, if one considers these children’s actual level of general participation (U), which is so low [i.e. aggregated results of ++ (3.1%) and + (3.1%) = total 6.2% of positive results], it is not surprising that their perceptions are also quite negative.

The same situation occurs with regards to their perceptions concerning ‘democracy and citizenship’ in the school and their participation in such processes (BDC): the negative

scores (53.1% of negative results) they attribute to their current environment constitute a very accurate portrait of the school's performance in that domain (see chapter 6).

The opposite situation is verified with regards to the element 'participation being beneficial for children' (BP, P). Indeed, both background (BP) and event-related indicators (P) present a majority of positive results (respectively: 65.6% and 68.7% of positive results). Once again, prudence is necessary in the interpretation of these results. On the one hand, this was one of the elements that demonstrated the least discrepancy at the other levels (chapters 6 and 7), being viewed almost unanimously as positive by the different participants. The children's results are, therefore in line with those observed on previous levels. On the other hand, for the reasons mentioned in those chapters, the presence of positive scores should not be taken as demonstrating a causal relation between participation and the emergence of skills.

Perhaps the most interesting case is that of elements in which the background receives a positive appreciation while the events observed portray mostly negative results. Those elements are (see table 8.1): 'non-discrimination' (BD, D); 'non-traditional conception of children' (BN, N) and 'powersharing' (BPW, PW). There are, therefore, discrepancies between the two types of indicators, with a tendency for perceptions being more positive than the actual participation observed. Explanations as to why that happens can be volunteered: firstly, these elements had been deemed in the previous chapters as more 'demanding' than the remainder. For that reason, it may be more difficult for children to exercise participation in these areas.

A different interpretation might be that these discrepancies represent the existence of low expectations with regards to participation on the part of the children, which would



imply that a ‘low’ level of actual participation would be considered enough or satisfactory on their part. Were this confirmed, suppositions could be made to the effect that, not having had the experience of highly participative contexts and not knowing otherwise, the children might be content with their current level of participation.

Another possible explanation – which entails a more positive perspective – is that, even if *quantitatively* their participation level is not high, children might be satisfied with the *qualitative* aspects of such participation. Yet another reason might be linked with the fact that different children have diverse experiences of participation, thus contributing to the imbalance in the overall results, i.e. they contribute differently to the presence of either more positive or more negative results, whether in background or event-related indicators.

It is believed that the latter explanation is the one that more accurately justifies the results obtained. This will be further explored in the section that follows, which concentrates on the factors that might be at the origin of those differences.

#### **8.4. Exploring the ‘age’ and ‘type of class’ hypotheses**

This section is dedicated primarily to the examination of the ‘age’ and ‘classroom’ hypotheses. In fact, it is related to the analysis of how these factors impact on the perceptions and behaviour of individual children.

The ‘age’ factor will be operationalised as follows: years 1 and 2 will be considered the ‘younger’ group, whereas years 3 and 4 will be considered the ‘older’ group. The ‘type of class’ factor will be linked to the type of teachers’ attitudes observed on the basis of

the results presented in chapter 7 (see e.g. table 7.13). This will be operationalised as follows: Ruth, Arthur, Lucia, Clara, although to different degrees – as will be discussed in chapter 9 – seem to have expressed ‘more participation-oriented attitudes’ and their classes will, therefore, be identified as such; whereas, Nina, Filipa, Eunice and Laura seemed to express generally ‘less participation-oriented attitudes’ and their classes will, inherently, be designated as such.

Although the results used are included in table 8.1, in order to make the current presentation more clear, they were organised in a manner that highlights the two factors under study (table 8.2). Furthermore, to simplify the analysis, the results from the four-cluster analysis were also aggregated into two summarising clusters: more participative (+) and less participative (-). That analysis will pertain to the two aspects presented in the hypotheses:

Firstly, whether children sharing the same characteristics – in terms of age or type of class, as observed in chapter 7 – also share similar results. To accomplish such an analysis, it was decided to proceed to an account of the number of children sharing the most frequent result in each group, independently of whether that result was more negative or more positive. The rationale behind this decision was that the factor in which the value of shared results would be higher would be the one having a greater influence upon participation.

Secondly, it was assessed whether the vector defined by the hypotheses is verified, i.e. if older children present better results than younger ones and if children belonging to a class where the teacher portrayed more positive attitudes towards participation, as observed in chapter 7, present better results than those in other classes. For that purpose,



the sign associated with the most frequent result in each group, i.e. ‘+’ or ‘-’, was added to the presentation.

A caveat has to be made, however, as to the results presented in the following table (table 8.2). As each group was composed of a total of 16 children, it could happen that half of the children portrayed more positive results (+), while the other half presented more negative ones (-). This could have rendered the definition of a vector quite difficult as, necessarily, none would be more frequent than the other. In such cases, the most frequent extreme results, i.e. the number of ‘++’ and ‘--’ in that group, were considered to determine the sense of the vector. Still, these indicate only a tendency in the vector and, therefore, such results appear in parentheses in table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Children sharing the most frequent result in each group

Characteristic	Groups	BU	U	BD	D	BN	N	BP	P	BDC	BPW	PW	Overall mode + / ++ (+) - / - (-)	Social acceptance perception cluster	Academic status
Age	Younger	9 +	15 -	11 +	10 -	9 +	13 -	8 (+)	12 +	8 (+)	8 (-)	8 (+/-)	8 (+/-)	9 -	13 +
	Older	13 -	15 -	9 +	13 -	8 (-)	14 -	13 +	10 +	9 -	10 +	13 -	12 -	8 (-)	12 +
	Total	22	30	20	23	17	27	21	22	17	18	21			
	Total percentage (average=67.6%)	68.8	93.8	62.5	71.9	53.1	84.4	65.6	68.8	53.1	56.2	65.6			
Type of class	Less participative	15 -	14 -	10 +	10 -	9 -	11 -	10 +	11 +	13 -	12 -	10 -	9 -	11 -	12 +
	More participative	9 +	16 -	10 +	13 -	10 +	16 -	11 +	10 +	12 +	14 +	11 -	11 -	10 +	13 +
	Total	24	30	20	23	19	27	21	21	25	26	21			
	Total percentage (average=73%)	75	93.8	62.5	71.9	59.4	84.4	65.6	65.6	78.1	81.2	65.6			

Concerning the first aspect of the hypotheses under analysis – the one regarding the similarity of results within each group, which is expressed in table 8.2 by the ‘total’ results – it can be said that the level attained by both factors was high: in no case was the value obtained under the 16 children mark, i.e. 50%. Furthermore, the comparison between the results of the two different factors revealed no major discrepancies. In fact, with regards to most elements (U, BD, D, N, BP, PW), the total values are even



equivalent between the two factors. Still, the ‘type of class’ factor seems to exert a slightly greater level of influence on the results, as 73% of children on average manifest similar scores, while that value is 67.6% in the case of the ‘age’ factor.

Notwithstanding the relevance of the aspects presented above, it is believed that the most interesting differences between the two factors emerge when the second aspect of the hypotheses proposed is considered, i.e. that which predicts a precedence in the results of some children over others, according to the characteristics defined: being older or belonging to a class in which the teacher’s attitudes were more participation-oriented.

The cases in which that prevalence was actually verified are highlighted in grey in table 8.2. As it can be appreciated, such cases occurred more often with regards to the ‘type of class’ factor (5 cases) than the ‘age’ factor (2 cases). This would tend to indicate a greater influence of the latter factor upon the children’s perceptions and behaviour.

#### **8.4.1. Analysis of the ‘age’ factor**

It is appropriate to explore, however, the cases in which the ‘age’ factor appears to have a certain influence: on the background results of both the ‘benefits of participation’ (BP) and ‘powersharing’ (BPW) elements. The latter aspect (BPW) is all the more interesting as this was one of the elements in which the predominance of the ‘age’ factor was expected (see chapter 6) and that prevalence had not yet been verified in previous chapters. It is, however, the former (BP) which provides more relevant substance for discussion. In fact, it had also been volunteered in chapter 6, that the ‘age’ factor could have an effect upon this element. At the time, discrepancies had been



noticed between children's capability of 'identifying realistic problems' and that of 'proposing feasible solutions' for those problems (respectively in indicators BP59 and BP60, table 6.9, in chapter 6). It was suggested back then that 'proposing solutions' could be considered as a more advanced stage in the evolution of participation-related skills and one that could be related to the children's cognitive development, as much as to their experience of participation. The results above seem to give credit to that supposition.

With regards to the element on the 'benefits of participation', qualitative data also corroborate that the proficiency and accuracy of virtually all children – even the youngest (six-year-olds) – to pinpoint the school's problems was very developed: not only were they able to identify problematic issues that had already been mentioned to the researcher by the school's staff, but they expanded on to aspects that were unknown to the both the researcher and the teachers (which could have nonetheless contributed to great improvements in the school's functioning had they been acknowledged by the staff). The latter included, for instance, issues regarding the children's safety, e.g. during recreation:

'There are many kids who fall down from the playground apparatus... and my friend broke her arm when she fell (...) we should have a playtime attendant watching over us near each apparatus: one near the slides, another one near the swing, so that we have more safety'.

(Marina, year 3, Lucia's class, on 13/06/00)

'I'd put a fence near the gas canisters [propane for kitchen use] because there are some kids that, when the canisters are out, they stick little branches there and the gas starts coming out... and they can get intoxicated'.

(Samuel, year 4, Laura's class, on 06/06/00)

The former type of issues, i.e. those that were also considered as a problem by the staff, regarded mainly security aspects, as the school had been burgled three times in the course of the previous year. Those facts – as well as a serious concern for the school’s security – were expressed by each and everyone of the eight groups interviewed, without exception.

It seemed, therefore, that no particular differences could be found between older and younger children’s responses in what concerns the capacity of *identifying* realistic problems. Once again, the aspect in which some discrepancies could be noticed was in the *type of solutions* proposed: while the older children mentioned ‘alarms’ and ‘video cameras’ as measures to improve the school security, less realistic solutions were volunteered by some of the younger children, such as:

‘We’d need 250 security guards (...) stuck to the ceiling with scotch tape, so that the bad guys couldn’t see them’.

(Antonio, year 1, Ruth’s class, on 07/06/00)

‘I’d want the school to be magical and take care of the thieves and they’d start crying (...) we’d do like that kid in [the film] ‘home alone’.

(Camila, year 2, Filipa’s class, on 07/06/00)

That being said, although it needs to be acknowledged, the effect of ‘age’ did not seem to be manifested with regards to all the children, as many of the younger ones also obtained high values in this element, which justifies its 71.9% positive results’ average (see indicator BP60, table 6.9 in chapter 6). This aspect will be further discussed in chapter 9.



Paradoxically, it is quite interesting to notice that the younger children demonstrate better results than the older ones in the majority of elements (BU, BD, D, BN, N, P, BDC, PW in table 8.2). Indeed, it is believed that these results can be explained, not by the 'age' factor, but by the fact that they were simultaneously subject to the influence of the 'type of class' factor: it also seems legitimate to propose that the fact that Ruth's and Arthur's classes – two of the teachers portraying the more participation-oriented attitudes in chapter 7 – were part of the 'younger' group is not unrelated to that group's high scores. This provides also a good opportunity to introduce the debate concerning the results occasioned by the 'type of class' factor.

#### **8.4.2. Specific analysis of the 'type of class' factor**

In fact, the same type of incongruity can be noticed in these results: with regards to all the event-related indicators (U, D, N, P, PW), the supposedly 'less participative' group demonstrates apparently better results than the 'more participative' one (table 8.2). This tendency had already been verified in chapter 7. As it was explained at that moment, it is believed that this fact does not undermine the interpretation which was advanced, for the qualitative material clearly supports the established group allocation. Besides, in the present case, the gap in the precedence of 'less' participative group over the 'more' participative one cannot be pointed out as very large: a maximum of 4 points (i.e. in element N, table 8.2).

The same cannot be said about the cases in which the 'more' participative group demonstrates better results than the other group (BU, BN, BP, BDC, BPW, in table 8.2): the discrepancies are very pronounced (with a maximum of up to 26 points, in element BPW) in the majority of cases, with the 'more' participative group portraying mostly

positive results while the ‘less’ participative group presents chiefly negative ones (e.g. in BU, BN, BDC, BPW).

Therefore, when comparing the results related with the factors under analysis, it would appear that the ‘type of class’ factor would exert a greater level of influence than the ‘age’ factor, not only because of the number of cases in which the hypothesis formulated was discerned – five against two – but particularly because of the discrepancy of results within those cases, which tends to indicate that the children were having very different participation experiences. Such cases will now be analysed in further detail and several examples will be provided to try to illustrate the contrasts in children’s reported experience of participation.

The first element to be addressed is that of ‘participation being beneficial’ background indicators (BP), in which the differences were not very accentuated. Still, the mere existence of such differences would tend to corroborate the supposition – which was advanced in the section concerning the ‘age’ factor – that it would be not only the children’s cognitive development but also their participation experience that would have an impact upon the evolution of the so-called participation skills.

It is interesting to notice, however, that the greater level of discrepancy between ‘more’ and ‘less’ participative groups can be found in those elements that had been deemed as more ‘demanding’ with regards to participation (e.g. BN, BDC, BPW, please refer to the debate in chapters 6 and 7). In fact, as it can be appreciated in table 8.2, the experience of one group seems to be the opposite of the other: one almost exclusively positive and the other mostly negative. As mentioned above, qualitative material will now be used in trying to provide a better insight into the nature of children’s experience



in each type of class (Tierney, 2002). That being said, the ‘universality of the right’ (BU) element will not be sampled, as qualitative excerpts have already been provided in chapter 7.

In what concerns the ‘non-traditional conception of children’ element (BN) the differences appear to reside mainly in the perception children have of their relationships with teachers. In general, within the ‘less’ participative group, children’s perceptions seem to be characterised by a feeling that teachers demonstrate a certain untrustworthiness towards them as well as a lack of confidence in their capabilities. In more extreme cases, the relationship is even portrayed as being dominated by fear:

*Camila* If I were the teacher, I’d put them [the pupils] together at the computer... working... And those who couldn’t do the exercise... I’d pull their earlobes and ask: ‘why did you lie to me?’

(...)

*Marcia* But a good teacher is... being good to us and not hitting the kids, isn’t it? And I’ve seen our teacher hitting people in our class...

*Rosa* It’s because they didn’t know things [the right answers]... That’s why I don’t ask her when I don’t know something; I’m afraid she’ll hit me too.

*Cristina* Me too... She’s mean! She once smacked J. in the face... and his nose started bleeding’.

(Filipa’s class’ group, year 2, on 07/06/00)

It is interesting to consider this excerpt while having in mind teacher Filipa’s description of similar events (see chapter 7). To a certain point, there seems to be a mimicking attitude from the pupils (especially Camila) of the ways they know the teacher may deal with unsuccessful responses; while on the other hand, there is a certain criticism of such actions, which is present in the comment that they are not

representative of a ‘good’ teacher (Marcia). Therefore, unlike what Filipa pretended, her actions were not inconsequential with regards both to the way children perceived them and to the way they moulded their behaviour upon them: in some cases (e.g. Rosa, Cristina), the teacher’s actions even induced reluctance to participate for fear of reprisal when failing to respond to the expected standards.

A different perspective presents teachers as showing confidence in children’s capabilities and a relationship characterised by mutual sharing:

‘It’s just like the teachers say: the teachers teach us the vowels... the alphabet... and all that stuff. And we teach them about how they were when they were little. [Researcher: How is that?] Well, we play with each other; and then they’re looking at us and then they start smiling. And then... we know right away that they like to see us happy.

(...) If I were a teacher I wouldn’t hide anything from my pupils... for instance, [my teacher] Clara had a sister who died and she... told us what had happened so... we don’t have secrets to each other. That helps us be more friends with one another; for us to be more... united.’

(Sonia, year 4, Clara’s class, on 12/06/00)

It seems evident that the type of experience portrayed by Sonia could not be farther from that described by the four girls above. In fact, Sonia’s excerpts will be used to exemplify a ‘more participative’ view, as this pupil seemed to possess an extraordinary insight and sensitivity with regards to participation issues and within school relationships.

With regards to the next element, a good aspect to assess the differences within ‘democracy and citizenship’ (BDC) was deemed to be that of children’s perception of decision-making. In fact, within the ‘less’ participative group, most children tended to



attribute decision-making exclusively to the teacher. There were, nonetheless, some children within that group, who did envision the possibility of democratic decision-making, albeit without the pupils' participation. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse the subtle differences in this type of discourse, when compared with the more participation-oriented group:

'to make a decision there'd be a meeting, but I'd ask for the parents' opinion... and everybody else's: the teachers, *the pup...* [interrupts] *no, not the pupils, isn't it?* (...) the pupils wouldn't have the patience because... if the parents talk at the meeting and all that... the kids don't understand'.

(Cristina, year 2, Filipa's class, on 07/06/00, emphasis added)

Cristina's primary hesitation followed by a need for confirmation with regards to pupils (non)participation in decision-making seems very illustrative of her own experience: an apparent lack of interest for such processes ('the pupils wouldn't have the patience') is believed to portray her own reflection upon adults' incapacity in rendering those processes accessible to children, in all senses of the term. This is consistent with the concerns expressed by Gale *et al.* (1999).

On the contrary, within the 'more participative' group, not only is decision-making described as occurring in a democratic fashion but, more importantly, children are portrayed as participating and having an important role within those processes:

'The head would come call each classroom with their teachers and then the kids and the teachers would start giving ideas... and then everybody would vote on the best idea and... that's how we'd make the decision'.

(Sonia, year 4, Clara's class, on 12/06/00)

With regards to ‘powersharing’ (BPW) the main differences seem to reside in children’s perception of the influence they can or should have upon their learning. Herein is an opinion volunteered by a child in a ‘less’ participative class:

‘I don’t agree with something they [my classmates] said: that [if they were the teacher] they’d let them [the pupils] choose; ask for materials... Because if they did so, they’d get used to it and when they’d go to the Cycle [Secondary school], the teachers would be a little bit different (...). They’d be used to saying what sorts of materials they wanted or not... and then in the Cycle the teacher would give them the materials she wants and they [the pupils] would say ‘no’ and they’d be in trouble... it’s a bad habit... to choose things like that’.

(Alexandra, year 3, Eunice’s class, on 07/06/00)

Alexandra seems to perceive pupils being awarded choices somewhat negatively, as a ‘bad habit’, as something pupils should not get used to, because ‘they can get in trouble’ when they move on to the secondary school. One possible explanation for such a perception may be that Alexandra foresees a great gap between primary and secondary school, with ‘choice’ being associated with a more ‘easy-going’ mode of functioning characteristic of primary school, which would not be appropriate for a more ‘serious’ school context. This perception is perhaps not without foundation. Moreover, she seems to portray the attitude that the teachers alone – and, implicitly, not the students – should always be the ones to exercise the power of choice within the learning situation. Therefore, not only does she admit the existence of non-powersharing relationships, but she actually promotes that view.

On the contrary, Sonia – ‘more’ participative group – expresses, once again, a different opinion. When asked about her views regarding an ‘ideal school’, she portrays it as a place where ‘everybody would be equal’ with different tasks being equitably divided



amongst the different members of the school community. Her perspective entails, therefore, what could be called a more ‘powersharing attitude’:

‘In an ideal school, for me, everybody would be equal: the employees, the children, the heads... and the teachers... they’d all be equal! (...) one would not work more than the other... they’d all do the same things (...) and we’d help the employees make the sandwiches and also help the teacher with the teaching’.

(Sonia, year 4, Clara’s class, on 12/06/00)

It is hoped that these examples have been helpful in illustrating the influence of the type of class upon children’s perception, not only of their own participation, but of their conception of what is adequate behaviour in that domain. It would seem, according to these data, that their own experience as well as the model they receive from their teacher both mould their perception.

Last but not least, without any intention of being prescriptive, it is curious to notice the discrepancy between ‘more’ and ‘less’ participative groups with respect to the ‘perception of social acceptance’ (see table 8.2), which could suggest of a possible relationship between the latter and participation. This is particularly interesting because that discrepancy is virtually non-existent when the ‘age’ factor is considered. In fact, this provides a good opportunity for introducing the third hypothesis under study, i.e. that certain personal characteristics will have an influence upon children’s participation.

### **8.5. Exploring the ‘personal characteristics’ hypothesis**

This section will focus on individual children’s participation results (see table 8.1), collected through the indicator set. While it would certainly be interesting to explore the specific patterns of each of the 32 children’s individual participation, according to a

number of different ‘personal characteristics’, it was deemed that such an exercise would not be appropriate in the scope of the current study. That does not imply that an exercise of that type is inadequate or impossible to perform. That is why it was decided, nonetheless, to include all the children’s results in table 8.1: even if not analysed individually, they can always serve as a reference and have helped establish the aggregated results presented in the previous section. Furthermore, there is a strong conviction that, with minor adaptations in order to fit into a child’s specific environment, this instrument could also be used to observe and analyse individual children’s participation in future and different contexts.

For the moment, and for the purposes of this thesis, it was decided to concentrate the analysis upon the results of children exhibiting certain ‘salient patterns’, which distinguish them from the rest of the group. These ‘salient patterns’ are believed to help enlighten the role of children’s ‘personal characteristics’ as a determinant factor of their participation. They comprise:

Type a) pattern: refers to children who present exclusively negative overall results (identified by [ ] in table 8.1);

Type b) pattern: refers to children who present discrepant positive overall results (identified by [ ] in table 8.1).

Therefore, the current section will focus upon the cases of children demonstrating a) and b) patterns and will examine their personal characteristics, with the goal of discussing of an eventual link between the latter and the occurrence of such patterns. A special case will be made in order to explore the results of children designated as having SEN, as this was one of the specific characteristics considered in the hypothesis.



### **8.5.1. Children who present exclusively negative overall results: a) pattern**

At the outset, it should be mentioned that the children who presented exclusively negative overall results were – in all but one case – also the ones placed in the lower quartiles with regards to the results of their ‘perception of participation scale’ (see table 8.1). This can be considered as a positive indication concerning the validity of this scale, which was created for the purpose of this research (see chapter 5).

That being said, the main goal of this section is trying to explain the causes leading to the existence of such negative patterns. To that effect, several explanations seem plausible and appear, in fact, to exert a concomitant influence. Three of those explanations will now be advanced.

#### **8.5.1.1. Influence of the ‘type of class’**

Firstly, it is interesting to notice that this pattern appears almost exclusively in the classes that had been identified as ‘less participation-oriented’ (table 8.2). This could be seen as a supplementary indication of a link between class ethos and a child’s actual level of participation. This supposition is given additional credit by the fact that, for instance, in Filipa’s class – one of those deemed ‘less’ participative – all but one child demonstrate a an a) type pattern. Appositely, another interesting element of this situation is that the fourth child in that group presents a b) type pattern, i.e. discrepant positive overall results. This will be discussed below (section 8.5.2.2.).

### 8.5.1.2. Influence of ‘social acceptance’ factors

Secondly, virtually all the children presenting exclusively negative overall results show either ‘low’ or ‘very low’ social acceptance perception values (see table 8.1). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it was estimated as appropriate to include these data in order to complement the ‘personal characteristics’ factor as this scale can be taken as an indication of a child’s shyness or of a more outgoing disposition (Harter, 1985; Harter & Pyke, 1984). The fact that the children who present low values in this scale are also those with the lowest level of participation might indicate a connection between the two aspects. In fact, it would be plausible to suppose that a child deemed ‘shyer’ would be less bound to spontaneously intervene in class and vice-versa (Crozier & Perkins, 2002).

Virtually all children presenting an a) type pattern demonstrate both of the above-described characteristics: it would therefore appear that it would be a combination between having a ‘shyer’ disposition and being placed in a non-participative context that would constitute the most detrimental situation with regards to a child’s participation in class. It is not irrelevant to insist in fact that it is the *combination* of these two aspects which appears to be linked with the occurrence of the lowest results. This caveat seems necessary because it is also true that, when the context is ‘more participation-oriented’ – even if they may not attain the same levels of participation as their peers – children deemed ‘shyer’ (e.g. as is the case of Antonio, Joel, Tania, Julio or Sonia – see table 8.1) will, in general, present better results than those of a type a) pattern.



### **8.5.1.3. Influence of ‘academic status’ and of being designated as having SEN**

Finally, the issue of ‘academic status’ – and namely the role played by the fact that some children were designated as having SEN (indicated with an \* in table 8.1) – could not be ignored. In previous chapters, both at the school and at the classroom level, these factors seemed to exert a certain level of influence upon participation (see chapters 6 and 7). It will now be discussed whether that influence is also present with regards to the three children’s – designated as having SEN – specific results, which are under consideration in the current chapter.

As it can be appreciated in table 8.1, Angelo and Tomas, two year 1 pupils, do not present particularly negative results. This appears to be motivated mainly by their ‘event-related’ positive scores, which can, in their turn, be explained by a high number of spontaneous interventions in class on the part of the two boys. However, in their particular case, the spontaneous interventions were generally not followed by positive feed-back from the teacher (see chapter 7), which can be considered as a limiting aspect, if not of the quantity, at least of the quality of their participation.

A more serious case is that of Monica – the third child designated as having SEN – as she presents also a type a) pattern of participation (see table 8.1). Furthermore, the fact of being designated as having SEN is concomitant with both of the above-mentioned factors: being placed in a ‘less participative’ class and demonstrating very low scores with regards to ‘social acceptance’. The actual accumulation of circumstances appears to explain her negative experience of participation. This can perhaps be more thoroughly understood through her own description of that experience:

[the group was discussing what they had enjoyed most during the course of the school year]

*Carla* I enjoyed learning History...

*Joel* Monica didn't like it very much...

*Monica* I did!... I did enjoy it, it's just that...

*Carla* [interrupts] It's fun to know how people lived back then.

*Monica* Yeah, and I... I do study all that stuff. But I just don't seem to be able to learn by heart the things that I study... But I think it's... important to know those things... ancient things [i.e. History]. Besides, it's just that [teacher] Laura... when she asks a question to the good students... they answer it quickly; it doesn't take any time at all... but to those who... have more difficulties... I think she should give more time... If I didn't know something... she could give me more time, so that I could still answer the question... instead of moving on to the next person'

(Laura's class' group, year 4, on 06/06/00)

This account can be considered as simultaneously very candid and very perspicacious: it is very candid, indeed, because Monica, who is surrounded by three 'good pupils' in the group being interviewed (see table 8.1), appears to find it necessary to justify her poorer performances before the group and the researcher. To that effect, she simultaneously makes a very insightful and perspicacious analysis of the modalities of participation available in her class and the way they influence her performance. In fact, in most of the lessons observed in Laura's class, especially in History, children were given a lesson to study at home the day before, so that Laura could go around the class posing questions on that subject the day after. This system relied exclusively on memorising and reproducing information. Therefore, it did not seem to favour pupils like Monica (who admits to having a difficulty in 'learning by heart') thus reducing their active participation in class. Furthermore, it is very interesting to compare this information with that provided by Laura in her interview with regards to having the 'good' pupils' performance as a gauge for her level of expectancy. Monica does seem to be aware of such an attitude on the part of her teacher as she mentions that Laura will



move on to another person, if she does not provide the correct answer straightaway. Therefore, even within this system, it can only be presumed as to what benefits could be brought to Monica's experience of participation if only she could communicate to her teacher her need for more time to answer.

#### **8.5.2. Children who present discrepant positive overall results: b) pattern**

It should be noticed that, in similarity with what happened with the a) type pattern, the children that present discrepant positive overall results are those that had the highest ranking scores on the participation scale (see table 8.1). Once again, this is an element which seems to contribute towards establishing the validity of that scale.

Accordingly, the b) pattern is also manifested exclusively in the classes that had been deemed 'less' participative. This becomes interesting because the results of the three children presenting a type b) pattern – Cristina, Lucas and Carla – are indeed very discrepant from those of their peers in the same group (see table 8.1). It seems, therefore, all the more relevant to try to explain the existence of an overall positive pattern within a context where the majority of children portray poorer results.

One more time, several factors seem to combine and contribute to the emergence of such patterns in the results of the three children mentioned above. Their analysis will include a discussion of the results presented in table 8.1, in conjunction with data obtained through observation as well as informal interactions. However, in order to render the analysis more explicit, each child's results will be discussed only with regards to the factor that appears to be predominant in his or her case. It is believed that

these comprise: good results in terms of ‘social acceptance’, on the one hand; and a ‘high academic status’, on the other hand.

#### **8.5.2.1. Influence of ‘social acceptance’ factors**

In the case of Lucas, a year 3 pupil, it seems that good results regarding ‘social acceptance’ constituted the main factor behind his positive results (table 8.1). In fact, Lucas, without being in the highest ranks of academic status in his class, was a very outgoing and articulate child. It is believed that these characteristics had an impact on his participation mode, namely in winning him a larger ‘air-time’ than that of his colleagues (Burnett & Proctor, 2002). Furthermore, having normally a pertinent comment or a question / idea to add to the lesson, Lucas’ interventions were also well received by the teacher.

#### **8.5.2.2. Influence of ‘academic status’**

In Cristina’s and Carla’s case, high academic status seems to be at the basis of their positive results. In fact, in both cases, the child in question is the ‘best student’ in the class (as identified by the respective teachers). Therefore, and mostly because of their academic status, these children were the subjects of a privileged relationship and interaction with the teacher: they were allowed a type and a frequency of comments, which were not open to their peers, and were also the object of teacher-initiated interactions on a more frequent basis. Not surprisingly, these two particular children were the ones that concomitantly initiated most interactions in their class and were the recipients of most teacher-initiated interactions (indicators D18C and D19C, table 6.11 in chapter 6).



It would then seem that, due to their particular status, these children enjoyed a pattern of participation which was atypical for their class and much higher than that of their peers. These results are consistent with those recently obtained by Stoel, Peetsma and Roeleveld (in press). For that matter, it should not be forgotten, that the other three children from the same class as Cristina, who participated in the interview, portrayed exclusively negative overall results (see table 8.1, as well as the previous section of this chapter). With regards to such within-class discrepancies, it is also interesting to compare Cristina's and Carla's results with those of other 'good' pupils in the more participative classes: although they have generally good scores – consider e.g. the cases of Matilde, Edgar, Julio or Sonia in table 8.1 – there is not such a discrepancy in results from the rest of the group; all the children seem to participate more equitably.

Finally, it would seem that the children demonstrating a b) type pattern, who fit perhaps within a more traditional mode of participation – based upon 'paying attention', 'answering questions' – are favoured by their 'more traditional' teachers and enjoy very satisfactory levels of participation even when the environment is not as favourable as others might be.

## **8.6. Conclusion**

This section is dedicated to a review of the data presented in the current chapter, which is believed to have contributed to the investigation of the hypotheses under study. Therefore, with respect to the hypothesis concerning the importance of the 'age' factor (hypothesis a)), it can be said that, as it had been verified in the preceding chapters, it seems to exercise a moderate level of influence upon individual children's perception and exercise of participation. On the other hand, the results obtained seem to delineate a

precedence of the 'type of class' factor over the former, which would tend to indicate a confirmation of hypothesis b). This supposition is further confirmed by the assessment of specific 'salient patterns' presented by certain children. Indeed, the 'type of class' factor appeared to be particularly helpful in explaining the presence of more negative results.

With regards to hypothesis c), that which addresses the influence of 'personal characteristics' upon participation, the results obtained allow for several conclusions, depending on whether the more positive or more negative patterns are considered. In fact, if the 'academic status' did not seem to play a very significant role in explaining poor results, it appeared, nonetheless, to have a great importance as an explanatory factor of good performances, especially if these were taking place in a 'less participative' context.

The fact of 'being designated as having SEN' also seemed to exert a certain influence, but mostly when in conjunction with other factors. The same can be said of the personal characteristic related with the 'perception of social acceptance' – which was added as a complement to the previous two – only in this case, its influence seemed to be significant in explaining both 'more positive' and 'more negative' results. The implications of these findings will be further explored in the Discussion (chapter 9).



## **Chapter 9**

### **Discussion**

#### **9.1. Introduction**

This chapter encompasses the Discussion of the results obtained and the Conclusion of the thesis. It intends, therefore, to establish a dialogue between the empirical data and the theory. However, owing to the impossibility of addressing all the issues previously discussed, it was deemed necessary to define a focus and restrain that dialogue. For that reason, this section will be anchored upon and fuelled by three of the most significant issues raised in the course of the thesis. Two of them are closely related to the research questions and refer to:

9.2. the need for participation to be truly exercised by children;

9.3. the factors that influence the exercise of participation.

A third issue, which was inspired by the actual results but had also been implicit in the literature review, will also be discussed. It relates to:

9.4. the need to eliminate notions of ‘pseudo-competence’ as criteria for discrimination in the access to participation rights.

These specific issues were selected to be the object of the discussion given their pertinence and explanatory value with regards to the theme under study. In order to discuss these issues, the current chapter will review the results obtained while relating them with the relevant theoretical points they suggest. The chapter will end by

indicating the limitations of the study and by proposing several questions it has inspired, which are considered as interesting for future research.

## **9.2. The need for participation to be truly exercised by children**

This concern derives from the premise explored in this thesis, i.e. that participation is approached from a psycho-educational perspective. From this perspective, the main goal to be attained in the domain of child participation is that children themselves actually exercise participation in their everyday lives (Perry et al., 2002). The first sections of this chapter will be dedicated to the discussion of why it is considered that this goal has not yet been reached. A case will, therefore, be made for the need both to conduct research that focuses on the exercise of participation by children and to explore how its implementation can be improved. Subsequently, the chapter will address the contribution this study is intended to offer both to the investigation of the practice of participation and to its implementation in relevant contexts.

### **9.2.1. Clarifying the concept of ‘child participation’**

One of the first aspects explored in the literature review (see chapter 1) involved the concept of ‘child participation’ being used as an umbrella term (Cussiánovich, 2001) with no consensual definition or interpretation (Casas, 1997; Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996). From the different views presented, the one examined throughout this study was that of *participation as a right for children* (Freeman, 1992b; Hart, 1992; John, 1996). However, a problem exists in the definition of that right: it is believed that, in the available literature, the expression ‘right to participation’ is used as a general term to designate phenomena which are not necessarily of the same nature.



It can be argued, for instance, that the philosophical and ideological principle of child participation (De Langen, 1992) does not fit into the same category with an individual child's experience of participation in a Colombian school (Schiefelbein, 1990); similarly, the right to participation becoming an enforceable law in Austria (Kisser, 1996) cannot be considered as equivalent to the phenomenon of a couple consulting their children about the family's holiday destination (Sutherland, 1992). There are significant differences both in terms of the nature of the phenomena and of the level in which they take place. Yet, all these phenomena are presented as examples of, and are being classified under, the concept of 'children's right to participation'. There was, therefore, a need for better conceptualisation of the right.

This thesis tried to contribute towards that conceptualisation through the creation of four different concepts which illustrate, and are believed to be comprehensive of, the multiplicity of phenomena described as pertaining to children's right to participation. These encompass the views of participation rights as: a) inalienable, b) statutory, c) granted and d) exercised. These four views are explained in detail in chapter 1. In general, however, it is proposed that none of the first three views will fully attain the objectives it puts forward if children do not effectively exercise participation. This became, therefore, one of the main arguments throughout the thesis.

As mentioned above, it also became evident that the scope of the different phenomena, as well as the fora they addressed, were not equivalent. For that reason, the notion of participation rights taking place at different *levels* is also relevant, which implies the need for further systematisation. To that effect, a framework addressing the different levels at which participation rights seemed to take place was devised. It was considered

that such framework should encompass *macro-*, *meso-* and *micro-*levels. As the current study intended to focus in Education, each of these levels was defined as follows:

Macro-levels: International and European;

Meso-levels: National and Regional;

Micro-levels: Local (in the present case represented by the school), Classroom and Individual.

The intersection between this framework and the four views on the right to participation shaped the structure of the thesis, as could be observed in table 1.4 (chapter 1). Each of the elements resulting from that combination was supposed to hold great potential with regards to children's effective exercise of participation rights. However, that does not seem to be the case in practice: on the one hand, the statutory view appears to assume an unbalanced preponderance, when compared to the other views, in the attention and volume of writings dedicated to it within the relevant literature; whereas, on the other hand, the appropriateness of the macro- and meso-levels as fora for the exercise of participation rights is also questionable.

The two following sections are, therefore, dedicated to the explanation of the characteristics of these views and levels that seem to cause difficulties to the accomplishment of exercised participation by children.

### **9.2.2. Beyond Conventions: the limitations of the statutory view**

The discussion on children's right to participation has undoubtedly gained great momentum with the adoption, in 1989, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly (Burman, 2003; Dohrn & Kanelos, 2000). This



international document encompassed child participation as one of its main axes while, for the first time in history, establishing that principle as a statutory and binding right (Harris-Short, 2003; Newell, 1992). Following its approval, many legal instruments have been adopted – both at the European level and within the individual signatory nations (Stalford, 2002) – which, in one way or the other, supported the principle of participation as a statutory right for children (Kilkelly, 2001; Ruxton, 1999). These documents have been described and analysed in chapters 2 and 3.

Along with *awarding* the right, many instruments comprise also dispositions aimed at *regulating* the exercise of that right (Flekkøy, 1993; Hodgkin & Newell, 1999) in order to fulfil the goals for which they have been created, i.e. to contribute to children's actual exercise of participation rights. There are, however, several limitations associated with the statutory view, which can cause difficulties to the prosecution of such an exercise. These comprise the facts that:

9.2.2.1. A statutory view represents always a compromise solution;

9.2.2.2. Only a limited range of contexts is considered for the exercise of participation;

9.2.2.3. It is a view restricted by notions of pseudo-competence;

9.2.2.4. The way the view has been used has not always favoured the practice of participation.

#### **9.2.2.1. A statutory view represents always a compromise solution**

This first limitation appears to be unavoidable inasmuch as it is intrinsic to the drafting processes of statutory dispositions: it relates to the fact that 'laws-in-the-making' inevitably have to take into account the different points of view of the various parties involved (Cohen & Naimark, 1991; Harris-Short, 2003). In the current case, especially

at the macro-levels, these can even encompass views opposing the principle of child participation (Eekelaar, 1994; Murphy-Berman *et al.*, 1996). This implies that, whatever the settlement reached, it will always be a compromise solution between different opinions and will not necessarily reflect the most developed thinking on participation rights (Johnson, 1992; Melton, 1996). This limitation is particularly noticeable when the articles regarding participation in the UN Convention are analysed.

#### **9.2.2.2. Only a limited range of contexts is considered for the exercise of participation**

Another limitation pertains to the context in which the statutory right to participation is intended to be applied (Balton, 1992; Hojat, 1997). In fact, most legal dispositions awarding participation rights to children address specifically the context of judicial and administrative proceedings (Lücker-Babel, 1995): for instance, when the reports on the application of the UN Convention presented to the Committee on the Rights of the Child by the 15 states members of the European Union are analysed, more than 60% of the statutory measures regarding child participation in those countries refer to judicial and administrative contexts (see chapter 3).

It is not the intention of this thesis to suggest that it is not important – when children are involved in those proceedings – that they *do* get the opportunity to participate in them effectively; on the contrary. Still, such contextual restrictions imply that those participation rights will not cover the majority of children in the fora where they evolve daily, as it is only a minority of children in the world that will ever have to undergo a judicial proceeding.



Furthermore, even when other contexts are considered, they are often designated by vague and general terms, which does not facilitate the enforcement and implementation of those measures (Hammarberg, 1990; Kaufman & Flekkøy, 1998). It has been argued that this vagueness, for instance within the UN Convention, leaves the door open for the signatory countries to interpret the participation rights it consecrates as they see fit (Killerby, 1995). This gives them also the possibility both of upholding only the minimum standards and of waiving such application in multiple contexts where it would be relevant – such as that of education (Hodgkin & Newell, 1999). This is actually verified in practice when above-mentioned reports are analysed. In fact, 6 out of the 15 countries (i.e. 40%) do not report education as a relevant context for the application of participation rights, while 3 countries (i.e. 20%) do not even consider those rights as applicable in any contexts other than judicial and administrative proceedings (see annex 3).

#### **9.2.2.3. It is a view restricted by notions of ‘pseudo-competence’**

Perhaps one of the more serious limitations that can be attributed to the statutory view, at least from a psycho-educational perspective, resides in the fact that legal dispositions in this domain invariably refer to notions of ‘pseudo-competence’ – i.e. where competence is inferred *a priori* from a second variable such as age, SEN or maturity – as *conditions* for accessing participation rights (Verhellen, 1993). Whether by setting a specific age or through the – slightly less restrictive – formula requiring ‘adequate maturity’, such instruments introduce restrictions in the access to the right for children not corresponding to the enunciated criteria. This has been said to constitute a discriminatory attitude against young children (Lansdown, 2001) and/ or children designated as having SEN (Davis & Watson, 2000; Jones & Marks, 1997). In fact, if the

International and European legislation is analysed under this scope, it is verified that the access to participation rights is indeed limited by age- and/ or maturity-related criteria (see chapter 2, namely table 2.2). Furthermore, when that legislation is translated at a National level, that limitation is accentuated even further: the majority of dispositions at this level are guided not only by maturity-related clauses but, most importantly, they set a specific chronological age as a condition for children's access to participation rights. Indeed, a specific age is set in 39.1% of the measures regarding judicial and administrative proceedings, for instance, as well as in 62.7% of those addressing education (as reported by the 15 EU states members, see chapter 3). Moreover, in Portugal, where the empirical study took place, the legislation regarding participation in educational settings (e.g. student participation in school councils) is addressed only to students who are finishing their secondary education (Portuguese report to the CRC, 1997, see reference in appendix 1) and it is believed that it is legitimate to question why the younger children are not taken into account.

This type of upfront restriction seems to portray an approach that does not take into account the multiple and complex issues related with 'all' children exercising participation rights. For these reasons, it was deemed relevant to discuss this aspect further. That discussion takes place in section 9.4, where an alternative conception is also proposed.

#### **9.2.2.4. The way this view has been used has not always favoured the practice of participation**

The final limiting element has less to do with the content of statutory dispositions and more with the way these have been perceived and used, especially following the



adoption of the UN Convention (Armstrong, 2003; Fields & Narr, 1992). It would be fair to advance that one of the main problems resides in the over-abundance of literature and intellectual investment in the statutory view of participation to the detriment of other views, namely, the one pertaining to the exercise of those rights (Arnold, 2002; Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). As Kisser (1996, p.413) advances ‘laws are only the premises and participation must not stop at the theoretical level, it has to be put into practice’. However, many authors – particularly those committed to children’s rights’ causes and activism, who constitute, in fact, the majority of those writing about child participation – were apparently so content with the of legal dispositions in this area, that they often present the existence of those dispositions as the final goal with regards to participation rights (e.g. in Miljeteig-Olsen 1992), without considering its practical application (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997). It should not be forgotten, though, that from a psycho-educational perspective, the most important aspect of participation is *not* the mere existence of legislation but necessarily that all children actually exercise their participation rights (Armstrong, 2003), this being the reason for considering the former approach as a limited one as well.

Taking into account these four types of limitation linked with statutory approach to participation, it appears legitimate to claim the need to go *beyond Conventions* and concentrate on the mechanisms that would make exercised participation become a reality for children. To that effect, this chapter will now move on to discuss the appropriateness of different loci with regards to the exercise of participation rights.

### **9.2.3. The limitations of the macro- and meso-levels and the potential of the micro-levels as loci for the exercise of participation rights**

The appropriateness of the fora proposed at the macro- and meso-levels for children's exercise of participation rights has been challenged in the course of this thesis (chapters 2 and 3). In the macro-levels it is intended, for instance, that such exercise take place in the context of international conferences (UNICEF, 1990b). However, many have criticised such fora, judging them as artificial and as ad-hoc initiatives (Gale *et al.*, 1999) reserved only for a restricted group of children, whose representativeness with regards to their peers can many times be questioned (John, 1996). Moreover, those conferences have also been deemed as often holding paternalistic stances towards children and not using child-friendly procedures, which may induce frustration in (even the few) children that participate in them (Eskeland, 1996).

But perhaps the biggest limitation attributed to these fora is their lack of impact on the lives of the majority of children (Hart & Schwab, 1997). In what concerns this latter aspect, the meso-levels seem to propose slightly more adequate fora (Hart, 2002) – particularly in local government structures (see chapter 3) – but concern is also expressed with regards to the quality of children's participation in such contexts (Hart & Schwab, 1997).

Therefore, from a psycho-educational perspective, the micro-levels are those that may overcome the above-mentioned criticisms and encompass the most adequate loci for the effective exercise of participation rights by children (Hester *et al.*, 2003; Veerman & Levine, 2000). In this thesis, the micro-level locus studied was the primary school as it seemed to offer particularly interesting guarantees in terms of accessibility, of being a



locus that includes the majority of children (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990), and of being also part of children's everyday life and experience (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997).

Following the decision regarding the locus to be studied, it was important to determine what type of context would best serve the purposes established for this part of the research, i.e. understanding the processes and mechanisms leading to the emergence and development of exercised participation. It was, then, decided to select a context with a low level of influence of statutory dispositions.

In addition to the motives presented above with respect to the limitations of a statutory approach, this decision was motivated by several other reasons. On the one hand, this is a type of context in which participation-oriented practices have been known to emerge and flourish, even long before participation had been consecrated as a statutory right (Hameline, *et al.*, 1995; for a detailed account see chapter 4). However, even if it is true that participation can develop in these contexts, its exact definition and origins are not clear, requiring further explanation.

On the other hand, the research approach taken within such contexts is not negative, considering that the focus is not to explain the reasons for the failure of a programme or an intervention, as is the case in contexts where the level of statutory measures is high but where there is little exercised participation (chapter 4).

Finally and most importantly, it is deemed that if the processes and mechanisms leading to the emergence and development of exercised participation are understood in these contexts, the potential for intervention is higher and more immediate. Indeed, the possibilities offered for the implementation of measures favouring participation do not

need to depend on bureaucracy or compromise political solutions. As an example, it can be mentioned that programmes for the development of participation-oriented practices have been implemented – sometimes, quite subversively – in countries and regions where the political context is not favourable to such ideas (as is the case of the Colombian New Schools described by Schiefelbein, 1990).

Santa Maria School, a public primary school in the south of Portugal, was believed to correspond to the above-mentioned criteria and was, therefore, selected to be the object of a case study focused on determining the nature and the influential factors of exercised participation.

#### **9.2.4. The need to define and operationalise ‘exercised participation’**

One of the difficulties in conducting research in this domain – which is perhaps due to the preponderance of studies focused upon the statutory view – is that the right to participation in primary school has never been systematically operationalised (Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997; Scherer & Hart, 1999). It is clear, though, that in order to define exercised participation, it is first necessary to be able to identify it.

Within contexts with a high level of influence of statutory measures, the legal prescriptions define to a great extent what is expected in terms of participation (e.g. ‘participation in school comprises having a school assembly’). Therefore, even if the view represented in such prescriptions may be limited (Harris-Short, 2003), it is nonetheless true that at least certain indicative boundaries are defined.

However, in contexts with a low level of influence of statutory measures those boundaries do not exist; participation is not defined in such terms. Yet, the fact that



there are fewer boundaries is not necessarily negative: it also implies that there is more freedom of thought and less externally imposed preconceptions. Therefore, it becomes clear that the identification of exercised participation can only be made in the field, but that it needs to be fuelled by literature and reflection, as well as being supported by the appropriate observation tools.

Many have claimed that the creation of *indicators* of child participation might constitute an adequate way to respond to the demands expressed above (Casas, 1997; Saks, 1996). It is argued, nonetheless, that a set of indicators in this field should be vested with certain properties. To mention but a few: indicators should be easy to collect and understand; the set should be based on reliable statistics or other relevant information (Ennew & Miljeteig, 1996), not neglecting also the use of qualitative data (Pomplun, 1997).

A major part of this study has, therefore, been dedicated to devising, testing and applying an indicator set in the context described above – Santa Maria School – with the expectation that this might help clarify the nature of exercised participation. The set of indicators created (see chapter 5, as well as annex 7) explored the six elements deriving from the view of participation as an ‘inalienable’ right. These conceive the right to participation as:

- 1) Being universal in its scope and exercise;
- 2) Being against any form of discrimination undermining the access to the right;
- 3) Sharing a non-traditional conception of the child and childhood;
- 4) Focusing on the psychological benefits participation has for the child;
- 5) Being fundamental for the advancement of democracy and citizenship;
- 6) Being a matter of power-sharing.

These elements were adapted to the specific context of participation in a primary school. The decision to use these elements was based in the belief that this approach would produce a comprehensive portrait of the different aspects of participation as a right for children, allowing to determine the presence of participation-oriented ethos. Each of these elements was operationalised, in order to be able to target both ‘background’ and ‘event-related’ information.

In that sense, it is believed that the instrument created – the set of indicators – responds to two of the demands expressed above: it is based both on reliable statistical data, as well as on detailed qualitative material. Further to its testing and application to a specific context, it was realised that the indicator collection procedure presented, nonetheless, a certain degree of complexity, which could chiefly be attributed to the large number of different sources used. This aspect will be further discussed in the section addressing the limitations of the study (section 9.5).

It is believed that the instrument created presented a pertinent operationalisation of the concept of exercised participation in primary school, thus rendering it possible to identify participation-oriented practices, attitudes, behaviours and ethos. The results of its application in a concrete school setting and the implications deemed relevant for both theory and practice are discussed in the following section.

#### **9.2.5. The indicator-related results put into perspective: theoretical and practical implications**

Examining participation in practice and in a context in which its exercise could take place was one of the main objectives of this study. The application of the indicator set



to the specific context of Santa Maria School (chapter 6) demonstrated, however, that this school – as a whole – can hardly be considered as a participation-oriented context. This affirmation is based on three main findings: firstly, a predominance of negative results in most elements of the indicator set was verified, both with regards to ‘background’ and ‘event-related’ indicators; secondly, it can be affirmed that there was a lack of a whole-school coherent policy and practice in what concerns participation; and finally, important discrepancies between the different classes’ results were also detected. These findings will now be discussed individually as will be the practical and theoretical implications of each of them.

In what regards the first, it was verified that this school presented predominantly negative results in four out of the six elements of the ‘inalienable right’ view being considered, both in what regards the ‘background’ and the ‘event-related’ information (table 6.1, chapter 6). There was a flagrant lack of those structures and procedures that can be associated with children participating in schools, such as a school assembly, democratic voting procedures, bottom-up communication systems (e.g. suggestion boxes), etc.

In fact, it would be fair to say, based in both quantitative and qualitative data, that in no way was this school, in its whole, organised and / or functioning in a manner that supported child participation: while there were some positive results with regards to the ‘universality of the right and its exercise’ (section 6.3., chapter 6) and the ‘benefits of participation’ (section 6.6.), these were mainly accounted for by the indicators resulting from the aggregation of the classes’ results, rather than being motivated by the whole-school management.

Moreover, the elements regarding the ‘non-discrimination in the access to participation’ (section 6.4.), the ‘non-traditional conception of children and childhood’ (section 6.5.), the ‘development of democracy and citizenship’ (section 6.7.) as well as ‘powersharing’ (section 6.8.) portrayed particularly poor results. In fact, the amount of negative results within these elements was situated between 54.6% and 59.1%, for the background indicators, and it ranged from 50% to 75% in what concerned the event-related indicators (see e.g. table 6.1, chapter 6).

This is further confirmed when some relevant episodes, that occurred during the school year, are analysed (see chapter 6): for instance, in a whole-school event, such as the Mardi Gras parade, it can be argued that the children’s involvement did not go beyond a ‘decoration’ level (as defined by Hart, 1992), i.e. a level that does not yet encompass genuine exercised participation.

Another area where there seemed to be serious problems in what concerned the children’s – and even the parents’ – lack of participation, was that of the identification and placement of children designated as having SEN: it was recorded that decisions were taken unilaterally by the teachers – and sometimes only a few of them – who, in the specific occasion observed, did not even take into account pedagogical criteria or the children’s best interest to inform those decisions (a description of these processes can be found in chapter 6). This is certainly an aspect where the school could have benefited from the help of the technical and pedagogical support team from the Regional Educational Area Centre. It is believed, however, that due to severe understaffing (four members of staff to cover 31 schools and over two thousand pupils), the team was not even aware of how decisions regarding the placement of children designated as having SEN were taken in the school.



These aspects are useful both to corroborate the affirmation above – to the effect that child participation did not appear to be at the centre of this school's ethos – and to provide an indication that the four elements where the school showed more negative results might be considered as somewhat more 'demanding', thus requiring a higher level of commitment towards participation than that which could be found in this school. Therefore, the identification of these elements and of the specific problems they face in this school could be used as a platform for a possible future intervention, as these are necessarily the elements of participation that would need more work and investment if the situation was to be improved.

With regards to the second type of findings substantiating the affirmation that this school did not constitute a participation-oriented ethos, perhaps one of the most salient aspects deriving from the analysis of the school's results was a lack of a whole-school coherent policy and practice in what concerns participation: even if the school's educational plan – the document that defines the school's pedagogical orientation and also includes the curriculum – and the head's discourse were mostly participation-oriented, those principles apparently did not translate either into the functioning of the school in general, or to the majority of classes, as it can be perceived by the above-described predominance of negative results. Thus, it seems important to try to understand why this happened.

It should be mentioned that certain literature trends consider a school's curriculum as an important source of statutory influence towards the promotion of exercised participation (Brown & Harrison, 1998). However, it is believed that for this to happen, it is necessary that:

- a) the curriculum explicitly promotes participation as a value and,
- b) that a) being verified, such curriculum (or, in this case the educational plan) and its participation principles are actually followed by the school community.

It seems, therefore, necessary to make a distinction between the ‘principles’ section (both in the National Curriculum and in the school’s educational plan) and the more ‘operational’ section (i.e. that which states the learning and academic goals for a given group of children) of the curriculum. In fact, when compared with the participation-oriented principles stated in the National Curriculum (see chapter 5) it is true that the school’s educational plan does not fall far from that ideology. This is clear, for instance, in the opening statement of the educational plan which states that ‘this school wants to instil in the children democratic values, such as participation’.

Therefore, it would seem that the differences occur not so much with respect to the principles stated but to the actual adaptation and articulation of the ‘operational’ section of the curriculum within the educational plan. In fact, as it was described in chapter 5, while the National Curriculum covers areas such as Expressive Arts (Physical and Motor; Musical; Dramatic; and Plastic Arts) as well as Personal and Social Development (which is non-confessional) or Religious and Moral Education (of Catholic confession) (Departamento de Educação Básica, 1998), in this school’s Educational Plan only the Portuguese, Mathematics and Environmental and Social Studies subjects have been included. The fact that the educational plan focuses on these more ‘strictly academic’ or ‘core’ subjects reflects a growing concern (which was expressed by the head) with providing the children with a ‘good basis for their future by focusing on what is essential... and concentrating all our efforts in that they have a solid knowledge of the core subjects’ (Alice’s interview on 26/01/00).



There seemed to be a belief, therefore, that by reducing the number of subjects, the children would be more successful in those that ‘really count’, which can certainly raise questions as to a possible low level of expectations from the school staff with regards to the children. This is apparently confirmed by the fact that the school plan establishes ‘minimum goals’ which are lower than the ‘general goals’ for each of the subjects stated in the National Curriculum. In fact, this was explained by the head as a measure which was created in order to prevent many children from failing consecutive years: ‘We realised that if we demanded that they attain the ‘general goals’ of the [National] curriculum in order to pass them, we would have to keep failing a lot of them... So, we created the ‘minimum goals’ and we consider that if they reach at least those goals... they’re OK to move on to the next school year’ (Alice’s interview on 26/01/00).

Nonetheless, owing to the educational plan’s participation-oriented principles it can be affirmed that in Santa Maria school, an explicit promotion of participation as a value (a) seemed to be in place. However, as could be seen through the analysis of the actual role given to the educational plan by the majority of teachers, i.e. manifesting either no knowledge of or little interest in it (see chapter 6) it is also legitimate to propose that its participation principles were not followed by the school community (b).

This gives further support to the position that it is necessary to investigate beyond the apparent level of statutory measures: in the present case, having exclusively taken them as a source would have provided an erroneous portrait of the school’s ethos, which would have possibly been deemed as very participation-oriented when that was not the case. This is believed to have been indicated both by the results described above and, for instance, by an average of 55.6% negative event-related results (table 6.1, chapter 6).

These results suggest also that if any type of statutory instrument – be it the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the school’s educational plan and curriculum – is to have a significant role in the implementation of participation in primary schools, it would need on the one hand to be *known* and on the other to be *owned* by those it is supposed to address, i.e. that people would need both to have the knowledge of, and to identify themselves with, those principles.

However, in this school, only three teachers mentioned, for instance, having ‘heard about’ the Convention on the Rights of the Child, when asked about children’s rights. On no occasion, though, was that reference associated with participation rights, which apparently indicates that this instrument was not used as a source of influence in their practice.

Perhaps more worrying is the fact that not many teachers were aware of or followed the principles of the educational plan (being mainly attached to the ‘more strictly academic’ part of the curriculum), which was a much ‘closer’ statutory instrument. Because, in many ways, the participation-oriented principles of the educational plan served only a decorative purpose, it would be fair to say that, in this specific context, statutory measures appear to be a factor with little influence upon child participation.

Another level of incoherence was the one existing between the head’s participation-oriented discourse and her actions when confronted with potentially participatory situations solicited by the children. For instance, in the episode referring to the children’s suggestion that teachers do not smoke inside the school, it can be affirmed that the head’s discourse, on the one hand, and her practice, on the other, were far from coinciding (see chapter 6). This situation constitutes necessarily a potential source of



frustration for the children (Alderson, 1999), which they actually expressed spontaneously when they were interviewed (see chapter 6).

Some suggestions can be volunteered that might help improve the context studied: with regards to international instruments, it would be important for teachers to be aware and have knowledge of them, potentially through training in this domain. Moreover, in what concerns their own school's educational plan, it would not be difficult, were that the will of the school's decision-makers, for its elaboration to have involved more members of staff or for its guidelines to be democratically discussed beforehand, if not with the parents and children, at least with the whole staff (see chapter 6). It is reasonable to expect that, in such case, the staff would tend to a) identify with and b) *own* the educational plan, thus being more motivated to follow it. This seems, therefore, to be a context where there was a certain democratic deficit and in which even the teachers themselves could benefit from a wider exercise of their own participation.

However, even within such a seemingly unpropitious context, strongly positive results were present at the class level (e.g. in Ruth's, Arthur's or Clara's classes, see chapter 7), albeit not generalised: there were, indeed, important discrepancies between the different classes' results. This could be appreciated by a noticeable split – between positive and negative results – in the indicators formed through the aggregation of the classes' results. Indeed, more than 65% of these indicators presented split results (see table 6.1, chapter 6). This discrepancy represents the third argument of those put forward at the beginning of this section to support the affirmation that this school, as a whole, was not representative of a participation-oriented context.

If this discrepancy might be explained by the lack of a coherent policy and practice, the presence of some unexpectedly positive results requires further exploration, especially for the possibilities it offers with regard to the *factors* that influence the emergence of exercised participation. In fact, it demonstrates the resilience of participation-oriented practices to emerge in contexts where such emergence would not seem obvious (Schiefelbein, 1990); a fact that counters the claims to the effect that participation is a ‘luxury’ right, only possible to exercise when optimal conditions are present (Hart, Zeidner & Pavlovic, 1996).

An alternative explanation may reside in the fact that, as suggested above, this school seemed to be organised more as a ‘conglomeration of classes’ than as a whole body. Indeed, each teacher appeared to have great independence in running his/ her own classroom without external control. To a certain extent, this could be explained by the lack of a significant relation with the Regional structures of the Ministry of Education (and namely the Educational Area Centre’ support team) but it was also confirmed by the head, who ‘complained’ about not feeling she could comment or have an influence upon the functioning of each particular class without that being considered by the staff as ‘inappropriate interference’ (see chapter 6). On the one hand, it could be deduced that this type of school ethos may undermine the propagation of pro-participation efforts; paradoxically, it is believed that this functioning as a ‘conglomeration of semi-independent classes’, holds the seeds for an incipient explanation as to why some classes presented such positive results while others did not. Inherently, this might favour the understanding of the *factors* influencing the exercise of participation.



### 9.3. The factors that influence the exercise of participation

The exploration of factors influencing participation is motivated both by a theoretical need to understand the phenomenon in question and by the pragmatic benefits that can derive from such a process: it is believed, in fact, that understanding these factors will open relevant possibilities in terms of intervention. In the case being studied, for instance, it is judged that understanding why the set of indicators revealed such discrepant results between the classes within the same school (chapter 7), may help in planning future interventions focusing on the aspects that impact effectively upon participation, thus potentially improving its exercise.

Several types of factors are mentioned in the literature as being relevant for participation in educational contexts, e.g. the children's age (Casas, 1997); their personal characteristics, such as being designated as having SEN or their academic status (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998); the attitudes of adults, as well as those of children themselves (Pridmore, 2000); the existence of pro-participation materials and structures (Alderson, 1999; Osler, 1998; Wade & Everett, 1994); and adults and children possessing adequate participation skills (Holden & Clough, 1998).

Three of these factors were studied in greater depth, having contributed to the elaboration of hypotheses. Two of them – 'age' and 'being designated as having SEN' – are closely linked with the notion presented in the statutory view to the effect that these variables are used as a gauge that determines children's access to participation rights. Due to its ubiquitous nature within statutory dispositions, it was deemed relevant to analyse the extent to which this notion of 'pseudo-competence' (i.e. that which is inferred *a priori* from the variables mentioned above) used as an argument to prevent

children from exercising those participation rights, would be supported by empirical evidence. These hypotheses were, therefore, operationalised as follows:

- a) If the children's age is a determining factor in their participation, then it will be expected that the results will cluster along age lines, with the older children / classes presenting higher scores than the younger ones.
- b) If personal characteristics – being designated as having SEN and academic status – are determining factors, then it will be expected that the results will cluster along those characteristics, with the children designated as having SEN and the pupils with lower academic status presenting more negative scores than their peers.

The third hypothesis referred to an element that, although only briefly highlighted in the literature (e.g. Pridmore, 2000), was judged as fundamental to assess: the adults' ideology and attitudes. It was articulated as follows:

- c) If adults' ideology is a determining factor in children's participation, then it will be expected that the results will cluster around class-related criteria, with classes / children whose teachers expressed more positive attitudes towards participation presenting higher scores than classes / children whose teachers expressed less positive attitudes.

These hypotheses have been explored at the level of the school, the class and the individual children. The results were presented in chapters 6, 7 and 8 and are herein discussed with a particular emphasis being put on the pragmatic and theoretical implications of the findings.



### 9.3.1. Discussing the ‘age’ factor

In the specific context studied, i.e. Santa Maria School, the ‘age’ factor seemed to exert little influence over the children’s participation. In fact, both at the school (chapter 6) and at the class (chapter 7) levels there was no significant evidence of this factor having an impact on exercised participation: there was no clustering around ‘age’ lines (see e.g. table 7.1) and this factor did not reveal itself as a good ‘predictor’ of the classes’ general or specific results (see e.g. table 7.13).

With respect to the results of individual children, a minimal level of influence could be noticed in two background elements (table 8.2): ‘participation being beneficial’ and ‘powersharing’. It is believed that this may have occurred mainly because older children possessed certain ‘participation-related’ skills (in the present case being able e.g. to present realistic solutions for realistic problems), which can perhaps be explained by their more advanced cognitive development.

The results demonstrated, however, that when their class context was more participation-oriented, younger children could also attain as positive results as the older pupils (table 8.2). In fact, the results of younger children in participation-oriented classes were actually significantly better than those of their peers in classes that were less participation-oriented, even when the latter were older (see e.g. table 7.13 or table 8.2).

It was, therefore, suggested that possessing such skills certainly represented a more advanced stage in the development of participation abilities. Nonetheless, the

development of such abilities could be linked not only to chronological age but also – and even more significantly – to the class context and to children being used to functioning in a more participative fashion. This would explain, for instance, the fact that Ruth's and Arthur's classes, while pertaining to the youngest children in the school – respectively years 1 and 2 (6 to 8 year-olds) – demonstrated such positive overall results (see chapter 7). In fact, even at the individual level, younger children presented more positive results than the older pupils in the majority of elements considered (7 out of 11 elements, table 8.2, chapter 8). Therefore, according to these results, there was no evidence to support the exclusion of younger children from the exercise of participation rights in primary school.

This last phrase is important because it is believed that this issue must be discussed in at least two fronts. The first one regards the context in which the participation rights are to be exercised: if it is true that there are contexts in which the child's best interest or their immaturity may be used as arguments to sustain the denial of participation rights (e.g. giving testimony in court in criminal cases), the results above indicate that there is no reasonable motive to consider the primary school as one of those contexts.

Context is also relevant at another level: in fact, the results of this study seem to indicate that classroom contexts which provide opportunities for children to experiment participation will have, simultaneously and to a certain extent, an effect upon those children's development of competencies to exercise participation rights.

The other aspect relates to how 'competence' to exercise participation rights is defined: when the issue is finely analysed it can be noticed that, even in a participation-oriented context, younger children were not as developed as the older ones with regards to



certain participation-related skills: it is true, for instance, that while virtually all the children – and hence the younger ones too – were able to *identify realistic problems* present in their school, that number dropped to 71.9% when it came to *proposing realistic solutions* to those problems (see table 6.9); a task that did not represent a problem for the older children. Still, this happened only with regards to certain skills, which gives credit to the non-establishment of *a priori* restrictions: when the task regarded, for instance, proposing democratic solutions for decision-making and portraying children as participating in those processes, the youngest children, who belonged to classes where those types of processes usually took place, demonstrated significantly better results and more advanced skills than the older ones who were not used to functioning in such a way (see section 7.7. or section 8.4.3., for a qualitative description). It would be fair to say, then, that children's results did not support this 'pseudo-competence' approach, i.e. that which establishes an immediate association between young age and an altogether lack of competence to exercise participation rights.

Yet the results regarding parental attitudes, as well as some of the teachers' perceptions, portrayed the same type of stricter 'age-oriented' logic that could be found in the majority of statutory instruments. Multiple examples could be provided: it could be mentioned, for instance, that adults systematically awarded more rights – including more participation rights – to older than to younger children (see e.g. table 6.5). This would not necessarily constitute a strict age-based approach if these adults addressed the need to have *modalities* of exercising rights that were *adapted* to each different level of development. It can be argued, in fact, that development needs to modulate and guide the exercise of participation rights. However, it should not be used as a criterion to deny

to some children the access to those rights altogether, as appeared to be indicated by these results.

Therefore, it should be understood that the suggestion being put forward is not that all children should exercise their participation rights in the *same* way, but that the modalities for the exercise of rights should always be adapted to the children they address so that there is an *effective* exercise and not an *apparent* one. Taking the example given above, this would imply, for instance that, were there to be a school assembly in Santa Maria, the empirical results supported the stance that even the youngest children (6-year-olds) would be able to participate effectively, on their own, in identifying problems or the areas that would need improvement in the school functioning. They might nonetheless need support if they were to contribute to the proposal and exploration of realistic solutions. The results do not support, however, the view that proposes the preliminary denial of participation rights based on age criteria, from which ‘competence’ (or the lack of it) is automatically inferred.

This is only provided as one possible example of how effective participation can be reconciled with young age for these aspects, as well as the ‘competence’ issue, will be discussed in detail in section 9.4.

### **9.3.2. Discussing the ‘personal characteristics’ factor**

As mentioned above, the ‘personal characteristics’ under consideration were the fact of being designated as having SEN and academic status. With regards to being designated as having SEN, the school level and classroom level results appeared to reveal that the influence of this factor was more noticeable in the background aspects (such as attitudes



and classroom organisation) than in what concerned the actual performance of these children in the class, as will be seen below.

For instance, the majority of teachers and children (62.5% to 80%, table 6.5) do not portray children designated as having SEN as capable of participation in the class in similar terms to the other children. Moreover, certain classroom practices – such as having a support teacher working exclusively with these children (62.5% of the classes, table 6.6) – and organisation – including having separate seating arrangements (25% of the classes, table 6.6) – were deemed to undermine these children's opportunities of accessing their class's main forum of participation (Hallam et al., 2003). This is an aspect considered as needing attention, mainly because it is believed that, when in these separate groups, children designated as having SEN were not developing stimulating differentiated activities either, nor were they enjoying high levels of participation in their individual learning processes (see e.g. Filipa's description in section 7.4.). This aspect would necessarily have to be addressed if an intervention was planned for the context of this school.

Still – and somewhat paradoxically – children designated as having SEN presented, in general, above-average results with respect to child-initiated interactions (5.5% in comparison with 4.3%, table 6.6) and to the perceptions of their own participation (2.61 average in comparison with 2.58 in the 'participation scale', table 6.6). The observations in class and the individual results revealed, however, that these children experienced more difficulties in obtaining positive feed-back from teachers with regards to their interventions (see e.g. section 8.5.1.3.). Considering these aspects, i.e. lack of access to the main forum of participation and of positive feed-back, it can be affirmed

that the fact of being designated as having SEN appeared, to a certain extent, to play a role in the exercise of participation.

The same thing can be said about the ‘academic status’ (Stoel et al., in press): the results at the three levels examined – school, classroom, individual – seemed to indicate a certain level of influence of this factor, especially with regards to pupils with high academic status. In the majority of classrooms (62.5%) it was observed that the children with the highest academic status, the ‘best’ pupils – as defined by the teachers – were, indeed, the most participative in the class: they were responsible for 20.6% of the total child-initiated interactions as well as being directed 16.4% of the total interactions initiated by the teacher (see table 6.6). This happened to such an extent and, in one of the classes, the level of participation by the ‘best’ pupil was so high – 40.1% of the total child-initiated interactions and 29.7% of the teacher-initiated ones (table 7.5) – that serious doubts can be expressed as to the opportunities for participating that were left for the rest of the children in the class.

At the individual level, this factor appeared to be particularly relevant when the academic status was high and the context of the child’s class was less participation-oriented. In fact, the ‘best’ pupils in these classes portrayed relevant discrepant positive results when compared to those of their classmates; a phenomenon that was not patent in classes where a more participatory orientation was in place (see table 8.1 and section 8.5.2.).

A third ‘personal characteristic’, which had not been considered as a hypothesis but emerged as relevant in the course of the study, was that of children’s perception of social acceptance (Crozier & Perkins, 2002): individual cases were analysed and this



characteristic seemed to have an influential role with regards to participation but, once again, mostly when the context of the class was less participation-oriented (see table 8.1, as well as sections 8.5.1.2. and 8.5.2.1.).

Considering the overall results, it seems, therefore, that children's personal characteristics did play a role in their exercise of participation. However, as seen above, the influence of these personal characteristics appears to be mediated by or subordinated to the – more or less participation-oriented – context of the class attended by the children. The next section will, therefore, be dedicated to trying to explain what motivates the existence of classes with different contexts, with respect to participation, within the same school. In fact, as will be seen below, these discrepancies seem to originate in the attitudes portrayed by the different class teachers with regards to participation.

#### **9.3.4. Discussing the 'teachers' attitudes' factor**

Further to the aspects mentioned above with regards to individual children, other findings are supportive of teachers' attitudes as a determining factor of exercised participation. In fact, in each of the elements of the 'inalienable right' view previously examined (chapter 7) it became clear that the teacher-related factors were those that appeared to influence participation the most, both with regards to the background aspects – i.e. the creation of an ethos, a context – and to the actual exercise of participation manifested in the event-related aspects.

Several examples of this have been provided (see chapter 7), but perhaps one of the most accomplished indications of such influence is that presented in table 7.13, in

which the teacher-related results constituted the best ‘predictor’ of both the children-related and the observable results, as well as of those pertaining to the background and event-related indicators.

Furthermore, the data regarding children, both quantitative and qualitative, tended to demonstrate that the way a teacher organised his / her classroom in terms of the role played by the children, as well as the one he / she reserved for him / herself, shaped children’s perceptions of their experience of participation (see also Gentry et al., 2002): to give but a few examples, this can be noticed, for instance, in section 7.2. – relative to the ‘universality of the right and its exercise’ – in which children whose teachers have a more participatory orientation refer systematically to activities involving high levels of child participation, while those whose teachers do not share such an orientation tend to refer to activities that are primarily teacher-centred.

Another example of this can be found in table 6.5 – referring to ‘non-discrimination in the access to participation’ – in which the children’s responses mirror their teacher’s almost exactly, be it in a negative or positive sense. With regards to this element’s qualitative information it is also quite interesting to notice that, for instance, Laura’s and Filipa’s pupils reproduced almost word by word their teachers’ negative discourse with regards to pupils designated as having SEN (section 7.4.) to the effect that ‘they aren’t doing anything in our class because they can’t learn as well as the others’ (Carla, Laura’s class’ group, year 4, on 06/06/00).

Yet another example refers to the element regarding the ‘non-traditional conception of children and childhood’, where it can be appreciated that children tend to reproduce their teacher’s opinions about their own competence and ability (table 7.6).



Furthermore, a qualitative approach to the same element indicates that, for instance, Filipa's opinions regarding teacher-pupil relationships and the enforcement of discipline (expressed in section 7.7.) did have an important impact on her pupils' perceptions of the same issues (Filipa's class' group, year 2, on 07/06/00, see section 8.4.3.).

Therefore, even if the following statement might be considered as controversial, it is believed that these results highlight the importance of the view suggesting that participation must be *granted* to children by adults in order for them to achieve *exercised* participation. In fact, owing to the nature of the school context, it can be argued that the first steps towards children exercising their participation rights must be taken by the school's relevant adults, i.e. the head and teachers. It is considered that it belongs to the teachers to put in place the mechanisms, structures and processes for children to exercise participation or such participation will not be possible. Indeed, within this school, it could be seen that in classes where teachers did not assume that role, the levels of exercised participation – and particularly its quality – were much lower than those of classes where they did assume it (see e.g. sections 7.3., 7.5., 7.7. or 7.8.).

It was mentioned that this position might be controversial because the role of the *granted* view of participation has been somewhat devalued in recent years: some have argued that exercised participation should arise from children realising their power as a minority group (John, 1998; Stalford, 2000), building a strong group-movement which would struggle for self-determination and self-empowerment, crossing over to the world of adults in order to establish collaborative alliances with them (John, 1996).

Yet, it is valid to argue that children exercising participation – particularly in the school context – needs to be seen primarily as an exercise of power-sharing originating from those that hold that power – the adults – rather than as one of power-taking by children, as pretended by John (1996). In this sense, the view supported approximates that of Hart (1992).

The reason for supporting this view is anchored upon the fact that, unlike what happens with minority groups, children's dependence upon adults is not of an artificial nature; it is an effective one (Lowy, 1992). Then, it is proposed that it is in the hands of adults to promote child-rearing and schooling practices which encourage participation and progressive autonomy (d'Ailly, 2003; Dallos, 1996; Gersch, 1996). This is why it is argued that participation needs to be *granted* to children for them to be able to *exercise* it.

The next logical question would be to ask what motivates teachers not only to ideologically grant, but to put in place the mechanisms enabling primary school children to exercise effectively their participation rights. In order to answer this question it is considered that the different types of teachers' attitudes have to be characterised.

#### **9.3.4.1. Characterising different types of teachers' attitudes**

In order both to grant and put in place mechanisms for child participation it is believed that teachers have to consider that there are *advantages* in working in a participation-oriented way (Jenkins et al., 2003). Not only that, but they need to consider that such advantages surpass those of working in a more teacher-centred approach. The



perception of those advantages appears to be motivated by the teachers' attitudes and / or by a belief in participation as a useful pedagogical tool.

The most favourable circumstances for exercised participation would, therefore, be those in which there is a conjugation of a belief in child-participation both as a value and as a good pedagogical tool (see also Tal & Yinon, 2002). In the current study, this type of attitude appears to be represented by teachers who:

- a) portray consistently high results in the indicator set;
- b) present a non-limited view of participation by performing well even in the more 'demanding' elements – 'non-traditional view'; 'democracy and citizenship' and 'powersharing';
- c) apply those principles to all the children.

In fact, it could be considered that this type of teachers espouse most of the aspects deemed relevant with regards to participation. Without wanting to be prescriptive or propose a typological classification (something that could perhaps be the object of future research undertakings), it would appear that, in Santa Maria School, Arthur and Ruth would certainly fit this description, closely followed by Clara and Lucia, (see e.g. tables 7.1 and 7.13).

If the two above-mentioned elements – both ideological and pragmatic – are not present, it is proposed that teachers will tend not to *grant* participation rights to children. This can lead to either a very poor context in terms of exercised participation – as seems to be the case of Nina's or Eunice's classes – or to teachers waiving them when the circumstances are not judged as ideal, such as Filipa mentions; or yet not

awarding them to all the children, as appears to be the case of Laura, who clearly favours ‘good’ pupils.

#### 9.3.4.2. Potential origins of different types of attitudes

It becomes, therefore, very interesting – while simultaneously very challenging – to try to explain the origins of the different types of attitude described above. Were the sequence proposed by certain literature trends verified, the implementation of participation rights would follow a logical path starting from the ‘inalienable right’ view, which would be translated into statutory measures, which would in their turn lead into granted and exercised participation. However, it was argued that both in the current case as well as, generally, in contexts with a low level of statutory measures in place, the influence of the statutory view could not explain the results of granted and exercised participation, as it was virtually non-existent.

It is, therefore, proposed that attitudes of more participation-oriented teachers find their origins *directly* in the principles that compose the ‘inalienable right’ view: it would be these teachers’ *personal* identification with the values expressed by the ‘inalienable right’ view, not mediated by any statutory source, that would lead them into upholding a granted view and, consequently, favouring the children’s exercise of participation rights. This is consistent with the findings obtained by Tal and Yinon (2002) with regards to the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and attitudes and how these translate into their actual behaviour in the classroom.

Very briefly, in what concerns Santa Maria School, a possible explanation for such pro-participation values – deriving from an aspect that came up in the interviews as



unexpectedly as it did consistently – may reside in that *all* teachers who had, at one time or the other, favoured a participation-oriented practice referred to the great impact that the 1974 revolution had had in their personal lives and in the way they saw their role as teachers. The effects of that revolution – through which Portugal moved from a dictatorial regime on to a democratic system – were particularly felt in this region of the country, as it was one of the most active and committed to it. These teachers (e.g. Ruth, Laura, Lucia, Clara), who were either in the first years of their career or going through their teacher-training, mentioned, without exception, that at the time they were avid for new pedagogical ideas, which were previously unavailable owing to the political context. They recalled the impact it had on their profession the fact of having, for the first time, an access to different and more participation-oriented methodologies, particularly the Freinet Modern School Movement.

Other teachers, such as Nina or Filipa, for personal and, many times, political reasons, mentioned not suffering such impact or adhering to such ideas, having maintained a more teacher-centred approach. What is interesting, however, is that while some of the teachers, such as Ruth or Clara, maintained a pro-participation attitude throughout their careers, others, such as Laura, who had initially adhered to such trends, have abandoned them later on, referring to themselves as much more conservative and ‘traditional’ nowadays than in the past.

Without wanting to remain too attached to this specific example, it is believed that this highlights the importance of teachers not only seeing participation as a fundamental value, but of considering that there are pragmatic pedagogical benefits deriving from it as well. Indeed, Laura mentioned having abandoned that type of practice because ‘it’s

much more trouble than providing a direct, teacher-centred lesson... and nobody thanks you for the extra effort' (Laura's interview, on 01/02/00).

These aspects are necessarily context-bound but it is believed that they may help explain why, in this specific context, the teachers' patterns of attitudes developed in different ways. In general, and for other contexts, the idea to retain is that teachers' attitudes towards participation and their subsequent practice seem to be shaped more by their own personal values, to which is added the aspect of the pragmatic advantages they see in participation, than by any external source, statutory or other. It is proposed that these findings and interpretations hold, therefore, interesting implications for both theory and practice.

#### **9.3.5. The factor-related results put into perspective: theoretical and practical implications**

In the previous sections, the results pertaining to the application of the indicator set to a specific school context have fuelled the debate on the different factors that may influence the exercise of participation rights. It was expected that, by investigating a number of those potentially determining factors, the phenomenon would not only be better understood but also that such findings would contribute to establish the bases for appropriate intervention in this domain. This section will address both these aspects.

Three factors were proposed and their potential influence upon participation was considered. These comprised the children's 'age', their 'personal characteristics' – including being designated as having SEN and academic status, which were later on supplemented by a measure of 'social acceptance perception' – and the 'teachers'



attitudes'. It was verified that the 'age' factor did not appear to exert a significant level of influence upon participation, which was not the case of the 'personal characteristics' and 'teachers' attitudes' factors.

Yet, even if the 'personal characteristics' factor manifested its influence with regards to certain elements, it appeared to be somewhat dependent on, or subordinated to, the 'teachers' attitudes'. Therefore, the latter factor occupied the greatest part of the discussion in the preceding sections. For the same reasons, the implications volunteered will focus mainly on this factor as well.

Although generalisation is neither an objective nor a possibility open to this type of study, it is believed that the findings can nonetheless be subject to theoretical or analytical generalisation (Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, 1994; Pollard, 1996). This is, hence, the path followed in the current section.

In fact, perhaps one of the first implications of the findings is the realisation that child participation is not an intrinsic part of most of these teachers' value systems (see e.g. sections 6.3. and 7.3.). This can lead to an interrogation concerning the role that child participation may or may not occupy as a mainstream societal value: Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997) raise questions as to whether the first situation will ever become a reality, i.e. whether mainstream society will actually ever want to promote citizenship and autonomy for children and whether it would be ready to face the issue of adult disempowerment versus powersharing (Lindsay, 2003). In fact, it is legitimate to question whether, for instance in Portugal, the development of participation will ever become part of mainstream teacher-training or if it will continue to proliferate, at a slower rate, at the level of individual teachers' action – as it happened in this school.

The implications will necessarily differ according to one option or the other: it has been demonstrated that these principles and practices *do* work, even in adverse contexts, through the action of individuals who, by many personal, political or professional reasons, came in contact and adopted such ideas for their own practice (see e.g. Pridmore, 2000). Therefore, one way to proceed in the development of participation would be to work on a one-to-one basis, insisting on the sharing of experiences between teachers with different approaches, and perhaps focusing initially on the demonstration of pragmatic pedagogical benefits.

The other, more encompassing but perhaps more utopian solution, would reside in participation becoming a central value of the educational system, thus being included in mainstream teacher-training programmes.

In either case – as it is believed both would be viable – it would seem vital to instil either in individuals or in the educational system the need to move on from a dominant teacher-centred perspective to a more participation-oriented approach. That need does not seem to be felt in the present: in fact, most teachers in this school were content with their current more teacher-centred type of class management (see section 7.3.). As mentioned above, the findings suggest that perhaps one way to achieve this goal would be through an insistence, focused on teachers, on the advantages of participation as a pedagogical tool. Again, in either case, an awareness-raising process would be necessary, followed by providing both teachers and pupils with the tools to carry on effectively the exercise of participation rights.

Another, more pragmatic, proposal is to continue to analyse the characteristics of participation-oriented practices and invest in teacher training in this domain (Stone,



2002). This would be a valid approach either with regards to a whole-system intervention or to an intervention just focused on individuals. The strength of this proposal is believed to reside in that it could be implemented with relatively little delay, with great benefits to the goal that should always be the main one in this domain: that children effectively exercise their participation rights. Quite pragmatically this suggests also a shift in investment – not only economical but also with regards to the importance awarded to it in the literature – from the current line being followed, that of statutory measures, towards appropriate training programmes for teachers (Arnold, 2002) and the development of both diagnostic and intervention tools.

This is necessarily a perspective biased by psycho-educational concerns, which does not devalue the role of a socio-legal approach but *questions* the investment in further statutory measures and their actual impact, owing to the limitations mentioned in the course of this thesis. It favours, therefore, the investment in teacher training and diagnosis / intervention tool development, as the first steps to achieve exercised participation for children in primary school as well as a catalysing element for other types of developments: pupil training, implementation of participation-oriented processes and structures, etc.

It is also believed that another step that would benefit this whole process would be the abandonment of ‘pseudo-competence’ approaches to child participation rights. This will, constitute, therefore, the final of the three arguments put forward in this chapter.

#### **9.4. The need to eliminate notions of ‘pseudo-competence’ as criteria for discrimination in the access to participation rights**

As it has been mentioned throughout the thesis, most statutory instruments and dominant societal attitudes – which have been expressed by some of the participants in this study – demonstrate a pseudo-competence approach to the exercise of participation rights (see also chapter 2 and section 9.2.2.3. of this chapter), i.e. an approach by which ‘competence’ (or the lack of it) is automatically inferred from second variables such as chronological age, SEN or maturity. As a result of this approach, it is argued that, in many occasions, participation rights have been denied to children judged as not possessing the necessary ‘competence’ to exercise them; i.e. generally young children or children designated as having SEN. This issue has been indicated on several occasions throughout this thesis as constituting an element that undermines these children’s rights, which should, therefore, not be so dominant in what concerns the access to the exercise of participation. It seems important to justify, however, why it is considered that, from a psycho-educational point of view, notions of ‘pseudo-competence’ deriving this approach, should be eliminated as criteria for introducing discrimination in the access to participation rights.

Three types of arguments will be put forward in this section in order to support this view: firstly, this section will attempt to demonstrate the limitations of a pseudo-competence approach. This will be done by questioning it from an ideological point of view; then, by challenging also strict notions of ‘competence’ linked with traditional developmental models; and finally, and more specifically, by examining the appropriateness of this type of approach within educational contexts.



The two other arguments relate to the attempt to overcome the limitations of such an approach and reconcile developmental issues with the exercise of participation rights: on the one hand, by highlighting the role of adults and of the granted view of participation; and, on the other hand, by proposing an *adaptive* rather than a *restrictive* approach, which materialises in the presentation of concrete adaptations and modalities of participation exercise which have proven to be effective for children with multiple developmental characteristics. These are examples of children who might have been denied access to participation rights altogether, for they did certainly not correspond to the enunciated pseudo-competence criteria in terms of age, SEN or maturity.

#### **9.4.1. Challenging a ‘pseudo-competence’ approach**

As mentioned above, the first argument derives necessarily from the ideological position suggesting that, if participation is a right, then it needs to be available for *all* children to exercise, without exceptions (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Hodgkin & Newell, 1999). There is a growing concern, amongst researchers in this area, that the pseudo-competence approach, which can be noticed in most legal instruments in this area, does not encompass all children and constitutes an attempt against the participation rights of those deemed ‘incompetent’ by the criteria established. This concern is expressed, for instance, in what regards young children:

‘All over the world one is seeing the beginnings of a shift to a situation in which children are developing the skills, understanding and access which enable them to influence decision-makers and outcomes at local and higher levels. But has this actually meant that young children tend to be further side-lined? When we talk about children’s rights programmes what are the images we see? Probably many of us tend to have pictures of older children busily engaged in planning and implementing a range of

different activities. [...] But when we think about participation are we seeing [only] older children? [...] How do we make sure that younger children don't somehow get left out in our thinking on children's rights? Child rights publications – despite the talk of “ALL children” tend to neglect young children’ (Arnold, 2002, pp.14-15).

It is also true that, even if in some cases the legislator tried to make it less circumscribed – e.g. in the Convention on the Rights of the Child no specific age is mentioned but the concept used is that of ‘maturity’ – this type of expression will still be exclusive of younger children (Armstrong, 2003; Lansdown, 2001) and of children designated as having SEN (Davis & Watson, 2000; Jones & Marks, 1997; Trainor, 2002). Smith (2002, pp. 81-82) believes that it is never redundant to highlight ‘the importance of avoiding stereotyping our expectations of how children should participate according to age (...) [because] such expectations have considerable relevance to the issue of “age and maturity”, the criterion for participation which is embedded in Article 12 and in many statutory provisions’.

In fact, the way in which these rights are currently formulated presents these criteria as a *condition* for the access to such rights and not as variables that, while being important, should not constitute the basis for that type of discrimination. It should nonetheless be understood that this is not a proposal supposing that all children can or should exercise participation rights in the same way, but that their *right* to such exercise should never be questioned. The proposal being put forward is that such exercise should be adapted so that it becomes appropriate for each child in its *modalities* – as will be seen ahead – but never challenged in its essence, as is the case in current statutory dispositions (Holden, 1998; Rose, 1991). Still, one should be conscious that by stating it exclusively as an ideological position, this argument might be deemed demagogical. It needs, therefore,



to be supported by those arguments that find their roots in the psycho-educational tradition.

That process can be undertaken, on the one hand, by the challenging of strict notions of development and competence. It is true that ‘(...) western orthodoxies about childhood, view development as an inexorable path from immaturity and incompetence towards rationality, competence and autonomy’ (Smith, 2002, p. 73). However, ‘the way that one individual or group moves from one stage of development to the next, which is influenced by a variety of factors including culture, should not be used as a guide, timetable, or model for another group of people’ (Trainor, 2002, pp.718-719). It is therefore proposed that new ways of viewing development and competence be considered. For instance:

‘Existing conceptions of ability (or talent) and traditional views of talent development must be reconceptualized to account more fully for advances in our understanding of human learning and achievement. While talent may be reserved by some to refer to individuals possessing exceptional ability, in our description neither ability nor talent are possessed and, as such, we find little utility in distinguishing amongst them. Rather, we view intellectual ability and talent as different terms to describe the same process (...). Instead of a property of individuals, we characterize ability or talent as a set of functional relations distributed across person and context, and through which the person-in-situation appears knowledgeably skilful. In other words, ability and talent arise in the dynamic transaction among the individual, the physical environment, and the sociocultural context’ (Barab & Plucker, 2002, pp.173-174).

These authors propose, therefore, that ability and competence are not static characteristics possessed by individuals but are a function of the context and dynamic relations they establish. It is believed that this conception of competence was held by

some of the teachers in the current study who, while taking into account the children's age, had a view of their participatory competencies as being dynamic (see e.g. section 7.5.) and created a participation-oriented ethos in their classes, adapted to the developmental characteristics of their pupils (see e.g. Ruth's or Arthur's classes' results, chapter 7). As a result, it can be affirmed that children in these classes became more 'competent' in certain spheres – for instance in proposing democratic solutions for decision-making (see e.g. table 7.9, chapter 7) – than their older peers, who did not experience the same type of participation-oriented context. This would provide further evidence to contradict a rigid age-based approach.

A complementary notion is therefore the one which proposes that competence develops with participation, instead of being a pre-condition to it. In fact, '(...) by equating talent with useful participation, and by treating it as a potential of effective individual-environment transaction, we have expanded the definition of what constitutes talent and who can appear talented, advocating that all learning can be understood as talent development' (Barab & Plucker, 2002, pp.174-175).

Finally, most empirical findings provide no basis to support strict age-based restrictions, on the contrary: as mentioned above (section 9.3.1.), the results of this study (see e.g. chapters 7 and 8) indicate that even the youngest children possessed the capacities that allowed them to participate in the educational context, provided that the class ethos was supportive of their participation. In fact, it would also seem that if arguments concerning children's best interest and protection could be used in other contexts (e.g. judicial proceedings) to justify children's non-participation, those arguments would no longer be valid when the school context is in question (Lewis, 1996; Mortimer, 1996).



Up until this moment the argument rested with the demonstration of why a pseudo-competence approach should not dominate the exercise of participation rights. Yet, it would not be adequate to argue that development does not play a part in that process. What this thesis proposes, therefore, is that development be seen, not as a *restrictive*, but as an *adaptive* element in the exercise of participation rights. The following sections will therefore concentrate on discussing how development and participation rights may be reconciled.

#### **9.4.2. Reconciling development and participation rights: the role of granters**

Firstly, this study provided ample evidence on the importance of the role of granted participation in promoting an effective exercise of participation by children (see e.g. chapter 7 as well as section 9.3.4.). It seems that, in this domain, the key to successful participation experiences may well rest with the adults that interact with children in their daily contexts, with the views they hold and with the mechanisms they put in place to promote and enhance child participation. The view being presented is that:

‘Children’s development and their capacity to participate with an increasing degree of responsibility, is initially highly dependent on the supportiveness of the social and cultural context. (...) Adults should be sensitive to the child’s current level of understanding so that they allow for a gradual shift in the balance of power towards the child taking initiatives and having responsibility. It is important not to have strong expectations based on traditional child development assumptions about children’s competence (...). Parents and professionals working with children should understand that without the opportunity to practice expressing their views, initiating action or making decisions, children are unlikely to become competent and involved citizens in society’ (Smith, 2002, p.85).

A legitimate question might, therefore, concern the kind of support that needs to be developed and how this can be integrated in the school context. In this study, it appeared that the types of teacher support that were coincident with high levels of child participation involved, for instance: praise and positive feed-back (e.g. section 7.3.2.); soliciting opinions (e.g. section 7.8.2.); providing choices (e.g. section 7.8.1.); a democratic-oriented class-management (e.g. section 7.7.); assessment of one’s own work and that of others (e.g. section 7.3.2.); etc.

Complementarily to these aspects, several concepts – deriving mostly from a Vygotskyan orientation – might be useful as a way to formulate the type of support and the role of adults and granters. These can be found in table 9.1 and were collected by Smith (2002):

Table 9.1: Concepts that may help explain the role of granters and adults in a perspective of reconciliation of development and participation rights

Concepts	Explanation
Zone of Proximal Development	'Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development suggests that until children acquire competence to perform independently they can perform more competently with assistance. The ZPD is the difference between what individuals can do alone and what they can do in collaboration with others (...). When adults or peers are engaged in joint attention with children, this has the effect of working within their zones of proximal development and promoting the extension of their skills and capabilities' (Smith, 2002, p.78).
Scaffolding	'Scaffolding is a metaphor developed by Wood et al. (1976), out of Vygotsky's ideas, to help explain the graduated assistance provided by skilled partners. The partner controls those elements of the task which are initially beyond the learner's capacity, but enables the learner to do what is within her range of competence (...). As the child's competence increases the scaffold is gradually withdrawn and the adult and child's roles become more equal, until the point comes where the child can do alone what could only be done before with support from an adult (...)' (Smith, 2002, p.80).
Graduated decision making	'Melton argues that children's interests are best promoted when they are given opportunities for graduated decision making that "enable gradual assumption of independence so that full autonomy is not exercised until there is some experience with the decision or task" (Melton, 1999, p.936)' (Smith, 2002, p.76).
Guided participation	'Guided participation refers to the systems and processes between people as they communicate and coordinate their efforts (...)' (Smith, 2002, p.79).
Participation appropriation	Participation appropriation 'suggests that people transform their understanding through participation in activities, and become better able to engage in related activities' (Smith, 2002, p.79).

In fact, some authors have recently associated these concepts with the promotion of child participation (e.g. Smith, 2002). Without lingering in the exploration of these



concepts it seems, in fact, legitimate to establish such an association in as much as they highlight the importance of the role of the granted view of participation as a way to reconcile the exercise of participation rights with multiple developmental characteristics.

#### **9.4.3. Reconciling development and participation rights: proposing different modalities**

Further to highlighting the role of granted participation and of significant adults in putting in place the mechanisms allowing for the exercise of participation rights by children with multiple developmental characteristics, one of the arguments presented in this chapter has been that, while the access to the right should never be questioned, several modalities for the exercise of participation rights would have to be developed if that exercise were to be effective. This argument proposes, therefore, an adaptive view of participation rights exercise, instead of the restrictive one presented in most statutory measures.

While some studies – proposing several types of adaptations – have been referred to throughout the thesis (see e.g. chapter 4), more specific examples of studies in which these different modalities have been developed are presented below. They are mentioned as relevant examples mainly because they have allowed for the participation both of very young children and of children designated as having SEN – which challenges pseudo-competence approaches – and also because they give testimony of the many different modalities that can be put in place to enable the exercise of participation rights by these children. It is thus believed that they may provide clues as

to the possible reconciliation between developmental issues and the exercise of participation rights.

In what regards very young children, recent research, undertaken with children as young as 2-years-old, tried to demonstrate that it was possible for children these ages to express opinions and participate validly both in their daily activities and in research projects. In the studies described, this was achieved through the use of multi-methods, such as participant observations, child conferencing, use of cameras by the children to indicate what was important for them in their familiar contexts, drawing maps, role play with figurines, multiple interviewing in different settings, field notes of children's conversations with their peers, re-telling activities back to children in the form of a story and assessing how children believed the story should continue, etc. (research by Carr, 2000; Clark & Moss, 2001; Ledger et al., 1998, 1999; all cited in Smith, 2002).

As Smith (2002, p.84) concludes 'These studies show examples of the interesting range of research methodologies which respect children's agency and participation rights and which are sensitive to the need to study children's participation in context. They also show that even very young children can communicate about their views, intentions and difficulties'.

Another example of recent research involving, on its turn, students designated as having SEN attempts to demonstrate how participating in cooperative learning activities could constitute a legitimate way for special education and remedial students to participate consistently in the regular classroom (Jenkins et al., 2003). Further to the implementation of such programmes, the authors report that 'teachers saw cooperative learning resulting in broader student participation in lessons, more active learning or



greater task engagement in classroom lessons as a result of working together' (Jenkins et al., 2003, p.280). This might constitute an example of a modality of participation that could be implemented in order for children designated as having SEN to exercise their participation rights in school. It might also help avoid practices such as those present in some of Santa Maria's classes, where students designated as having SEN did not have access to their classes' main forum of participation (see e.g. section 7.4.).

Another study that supports this view indicates that these modalities could be valid even for children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD). In fact, that is the case of a study involving SLD students and students at risk in primary school (6 to 10 year-olds):

The findings 'suggest that consistent implementation of the UPS [unified plans of support] developed through a collaborative teaming process increased the students' engagement in classroom activities (with changes commensurate with the behavior of their peers). Increases in engagement may have been due to increased participation in interactive, collaborative activities with adaptations and support from peers, use of assistive technology with peer partners, and support from special education instructional assistants for the students at risk. There was also an increase in interactions initiated by the focus students. Implementation of the UPS with items including interactive activities, students working in pairs or small groups, use of technology with peer partners, and students at risk participating as tutors for classmates may have contributed to the change. Finally, interactions with classmates rose to levels substantially above those of their peers. These outcomes may have been due to the extensive use of peer partners and prompting to seek out peer support as elements of the plan of support (...). [Teachers] described gains in self-confidence assertiveness, and social interactions with classmates that they attributed to implementation of the UPS' (Hunt, et al., 2003, pp. 328-329).

Therefore, ‘cooperative learning’, ‘unified plans of support’, technological adaptations, or tutoring are only examples of the modalities that can be put into place so that the effective participation of children designated as having SEN in the main participation forums of their classrooms can take place, thus allowing for the adapted exercise of their participation rights.

In Santa Maria school, for instance, this could also involve the simplest adaptations to class management: a very concrete example of the need for such modalities, arising from the current study, is the one provided by Monica, a student designated as having SEN, which is described in chapter 8. In fact, Monica reflects upon her own situation in class, suggesting that her participation might greatly improve, if only her teacher would let her take a little more time to answer, than the one normally provided for the ‘good’ students (see chapter 8).

As a conclusion to this section, it is hoped that the arguments presented above were effective in supporting the view that age or SEN should not be used as criteria for discrimination in the access to participation rights and that the latter can be reconciled with multiple developmental characteristics. This might depend on adult support (hence justifying the need for teacher-training in this domain) and on the exploration of different modalities of exercising participation. To finalise, this chapter will now move on to discuss the limitations of the study and will end by proposing future research clues.



## 9.5. Limitations of the study

Having presented – in chapter 5 – the limitations associated with the undertaking of a case study, with the methodological options taken, with the rigour of the procedures, and with the ethical issues confronted, it was decided to utilise the current section to debate the limitations of the main instrument created for the purpose of this study – the set of indicators – which, for pragmatic reasons, had not yet taken place.

As it was briefly mentioned in section 9.2.4., the indicator collection procedure presented a certain level of difficulty and complexity, which could be mainly attributed to the large number of different sources used. However, if this can be considered as a limitation of the instrument, it is necessarily also one of its strengths, as the multiplicity of sources contributed not only to the richness of the information collected but, certainly, to its validity and reliability. Moreover, even if the collection of data might require a certain effort, once that stage is completed, it is believed that the way the answering system was devised ('yes' or 'no' responses), renders the results very clear to interpret and easy to understand. Furthermore, the fact that the instrument comprises six different elements articulated into 'background' and 'event-related' sections gives any future users the option of either applying it as a whole or utilising only parts of the set. It is also possible to use multiple combinations of elements and/ or sections in order to target the specific aspects of exercised participation one may want to explore, thus reducing the number of sources to consider and, inherently, the complexity of the data collection process. In fact, having been conceived primarily as a diagnostic tool, this instrument could also be used to assess a context's progress further to an intervention, following a classic research design: 'test / implement measures or programme / re-test'.

Two other aspects, with regards to the properties of this instrument, require a comment, further to its actual application: one relates to the element that addresses ‘the benefits of participation’. In fact, although having produced some interesting results, owing to an impossibility of establishing causal relations in this domain, this element did not seem to perform as well as the others and would necessarily have to be reviewed in future applications.

The other comment pertains to the realisation that some elements could have included more indicators than those presented in the current version of the instrument. For example, one of those aspects is the participation of children designated as having SEN and their parents in decision-making (‘powersharing’ element), which could certainly have been further developed. In fact, more indicators describing the nature and modalities of such participation could have been included.

The reason for such absence lies in the characteristics of the specific school observed, where that type of participation was utterly non-existent. In order not to overload an already long list of indicators, it was decided not to include, in this version of the set, indicators that were rendered superfluous by the nature of the context or that were conditional to a positive answer in a previous indicator. For instance, if an indicator demonstrated that there was no participation from parents and children in decision-making it would be redundant to include another indicator assessing whether that participation occurred once a week or every month. Accordingly, if one indicator demonstrated that there was no school assembly, it would be immaterial to include another indicator assessing how that body was elected, etc. In the future, however, this type of indicator can be included in the set if that is judged appropriate within the context being studied.



Casas (1997, p.294, emphasis added) has argued that ‘it is not desirable at this point to seek a universal set of indicators but rather *a process* and *a framework* that can be used to develop indicators for children’s right that are culturally and nationally appropriate’. This was the approach that guided the elaboration of the indicator set used in this study: both a process and a framework are presented, albeit not rigid or prescriptive. It is believed, therefore, that one of the main qualities of this instrument is its flexibility, which renders it adaptable both to what is contextually, as well as culturally, relevant.

## **9.6. Conclusion and future research clues**

As a conclusion of this thesis it seems important to highlight the main points that were addressed, and to the clarification of which, this study hopes to have contributed. The first of these stems directly from a psycho-educational approach and refers to the need to go *beyond Conventions*, beyond statutory views of participation rights, and to focus more intensively in working towards children’s actual exercise of such rights. For that to be achieved, participation rights had necessarily to be defined and operationalised. It is hoped that the creation of the four concepts of participation rights – inalienable, statutory, granted, exercised – as well as the elaboration of the indicator set, have contributed to that definition and operationalisation. Furthermore, the identification of factors that influence exercised participation is also believed to have contributed to a better theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. This refers mainly to establishing the importance of the granted aspects of participation pertaining to the relevant adults – in this case the teachers – towards the promotion of the actual exercise of participation rights by children. It highlighted also the need to invest in training in this domain, as well as in diagnostic and intervention tools, as the main means to intervene effectively within educational contexts.

In parallel, it is also believed that this study provides interesting clues for intervention and future research. In fact, it would be important to conclude by proposing clues for future research undertakings. The first of these relates to furthering and refining the development of the indicator set: this could take place mainly through its application in different contexts but also through the exploration of new hypotheses regarding the influential factors of participation. These could include cultural factors; factors regarding the curricular subjects being taught; the specific aspects of the educational process, e.g. decision-making, teaching and learning tasks, assessment; etc. This could certainly also constitute a first step for the development of effective intervention tools.

Furthermore, although it was not appropriate in the context of this thesis, it is believed that it would also be interesting to explore further the perceptions of parents and guardians concerning children's rights and duties both at home and at school, specifically with regards to participation. This could imply, on the one hand, exploring more thoroughly the data already obtained, e.g. through the comparison and differentiation between the rights and duties at home and at school; between those attributed to older and younger children; or to children with different situations regarding siblings; etc. While, on the other hand, this could take place through the application of the parents' questionnaire in multiple contexts, which would provide the grounds for comparative analyses.

Finally, it would also seem interesting to further the study of participation-oriented attitudes and what motivates them, in order to use that information as a basis for preparing the above-mentioned field interventions and training programmes.



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## **Appendix 1:**

### **List of EU states-members' reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

**REPORTS TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**  
(Available at: <http://www.unhchr.ch>, Accessed on Jan 29<sup>th</sup>, 2002)

Austria: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1994, CRC/C/11/Add.14 (26/06/97).

Belgium: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1994, CRC/C/11/Add.14 (06/09/94).

Belgium: Rapports périodiques devant être soumis en 1999, CRC/C/83/Add.2 (25/10/2001).

Denmark: Periodic Reports of States parties due in 1998, CRC/C/70/Add.6 (31/03/2000).

Finland: Second Periodic Report of States parties due in 1998, CRC/C/70/Add.3 (18/11/98).

France: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1992, CRC/C/3/Add.15 (04/06/93).

Germany: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1994, CRC/C/11/Add.5 (16/09/94).

Greece: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1995, CRC/C/28/Add.17 (25/06/2001).

Ireland: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1994, CRC/C/11/Add.12 (17/06/96).

Italy: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1993, CRC/C/8/Add.18 (20/02/95).

Luxembourg: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1996, CRC/C/41/Add.2 (11/04/97).

Netherlands: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1997, CRC/C/51/Add.1 (24/07/97).

Portugal: Periodic Reports of States parties due in 1997, CRC/C/65/Add.11 (26/02/2001).

Portugal: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1992, CRC/C/3/Add.30 (16/09/94).

Spain: Informes periódicos que los Estados partes debían presentar en 1999, CRC/C/70/Add.9 (12/11/2001).

Spain: Informe inicial que los Estados partes deben presentar en 1993, CRC/C/8/Add.6 (26/10/93).

Sweden: Second Periodic Reports of States parties due in 1997, CRC/C/65/Add.3 (11/02/98).

United Kingdom: Initial Reports of States parties due in 1994, CRC/C/11/Add.1 (28/03/94).



**Appendix 2:**  
**Non-aggregated results at National level**

*Appendix 2: Non-aggregated results of the countries' reports (according to context)*

Context	Field	Frequency / Percentage
Judicial and administrative proceedings: 133 (60,2%)	Welfare and social services	47 (21,3%)
	Relations with parents	38 (17,2%)
	Criminal proceedings	30 (13,6%)
	Other regarding personal status	18 (8,1%)
Other various: 29 (13,1%)	Family relations	3 (1,4%)
	Disability	1 (0,5%)
	Employment / work relations	6 (2,7%)
	Physical health	11 (5%)
	Mental health	5 (2,3%)
	Religion	2 (0,9%)
Education: 59 (26,7%)	School (general)	3 (2,3%)
	School representation and expression	11 (5%)
	School management	10 (4,5%)
	School statutory	11 (5%)
	Classroom	2 (0,9%)
	Individual attendance	6 (2,7%)
	Individual planning and choices	14 (6,3%)
TOTAL		221 (100%)



**Appendix 3:**

**Results by country according to context at National level**

*Appendix 3: Results by country according to context*

Countries	Judicial and administrative	Other proceedings	Education	TOTAL
Austria	8	2	6	20 (9,0%)
Belgium	11	0	0	11 (5,0%)
Denmark	3	3	6	12 (5,4%)
Finland	8	1	1	10 (4,5%)
France	8	1	4	13 (5,9%)
Germany	4	0	0	4 (1,8%)
Greece	7	3	0	10 (4,5%)
Ireland	8	2	0	10 (4,5%)
Italy	14	0	0	14 (6,3%)
Luxembourg	3	0	0	3 (1,4%)
Netherlands	13	2	14	29 (13,1%)
Portugal	10	4	3	17 (7,7%)
Spain	11	2	18	31 (14,0%)
Sweden	14	2	3	19 (8,6%)
United Kingdom	11	3	4	18 (8,1%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>133 (60,2%)</b>	<b>29 (13,1%)</b>	<b>59 (26,7%)</b>	<b>221 (100%)</b>



**Appendix 4:**

**Staff and children’s interview schedules and  
parents’ questionnaires’ double-entry table  
and categorising system**

## **A: Head's Interview schedule**

(26/01/00)

- Brief description of career
- Current functions (processes, impressions, goals)
  
- School functioning
  - Hierarchical structure
  - Decision-making processes (existence and functioning)
    - School council
    - School's government bodies
    - Parents' meetings / Parents' association
    - Class assemblies
  
- Children's rights and duties
- Manifestations of children's participation in the school's life / in their own educational process
  
- Issues related with the reform of the schools management system
  
- Issues related with SEN
  - Types of SEN in the school
  - Detection and follow-up procedures
  - Perception of support system



## **B: Teachers' interview schedule**

(common trunk – Jan. and Feb. 2000)

- Brief description of career
  - Ideology followed
  - Main personal goals
  - Isolating a striking event / person
- Perception of own role as teacher
- Perception of children's role
  - Rights and duties/ responsibilities (in school, in class)
  - Children's participation
    - In decision-making
    - In teaching and learning tasks
    - In assessment
- Description of own conception of good / average / with difficulties pupil
  - Characteristics
  - Interaction
  - Materials used
- SEN detection and follow-up procedures in his/ her class
  - Perceptions of support system:
    - Articulation
    - Progress

## **C: Children's group interview schedule**

(June 2000)

- Perceptions of ideal school
  - Who is there? What is there? What happens?
- Drawing on this topic
- Selecting a character in the drawing
  - Who is it? What is he/ she doing?
  - What does each character do? (Head, teacher, pupil, staff)
- Participation topics from scale:
  - Decision-making (decisions in class, choosing own work)
  - Teaching and learning tasks (presenting own work, posing questions in class)
  - Assessment (going to the blackboard, answering questions, self-assessment)
- Own rights and duties in school / in class
- What they liked best during the school year



**D: Parents’ questionnaires’ double-entry table**

- Question 7: Please indicate, in your opinion, what **rights** and **duties / responsibilities** your child has at **home** and at **school**:

	RIGHTS	DUTIES / RESPONSIBILITIES
AT HOME		
AT SCHOOL		

## **PARENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE CATEGORIES**

### **1 - RESPECT (BE RESPECTED; BE POLITE)**

- 1.1 - GENERAL**
- 1.2 - PARENTS**
- 1.3 - SIBLINGS**
- 1.4 - TEACHER/S**
- 1.5 - COLLEAGUES / FRIENDS**
- 1.6 - AUXILIARY STAFF**
- 1.7 - OTHER**
- 1.8 - ONESELF**

### **2 - EDUCATION**

- 2.1 - GENERAL**
- 2.2 - QUALITY SCHOOL/ GOOD TEACHERS/ EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT**
- 2.3 - LEARN/ BE TAUGHT**
- 2.4 - READ/ WRITE/ MATHS**
- 2.5 - DO SCHOOL WORK**
- 2.6 - PAY ATTENTION IN CLASS**
- 2.7 - STUDY**
- 2.8 - WORK HARD/ DO WELL/ HAVE GOOD MARKS**
- 2.9 - ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL WORK/ HAVE THEM ANSWERED**
- 2.10 - HOMEWORK**
- 2.11- FIELD TRIPS**

### **3 - WELLBEING**

- 3.1 - GENERAL**
- 3.2 - GOOD ENVIRONMENT/ PEACE**
- 3.3 - SAFETY/ PHYSICAL INTEGRITY/ PROTECTION FROM ABUSE**
- 3.4 - HEALTH/ MEDICAL CARE**
- 3.5 - BALANCED DIET/ GOOD MEALS/ GOOD SLEEPING HABITS**
- 3.6 - CLOTHING/ SHOES**
- 3.7 - HYGIENE**
  - 3.7.1 - ALONE**
  - 3.7.2 - WITH HELP**
- 3.8 - HAPPINESS/ FEEL GOOD/ FEEL AT EASE**



## **4 - LEISURE**

### **4.1 - PLAY**

### **4.2 - AMUSEMENT/ LAUGH**

### **4.3 - FREE TIME/ SCHOOL BREAKS**

### **4.4 - TOYS/ BALLS**

### **4.5 - READ/ BOOKS**

### **4.6 - WATCH T.V./ PLAY WITH COMPUTER/ VIDEO-GAMES/ LISTEN TO MUSIC**

### **4.7 - GO FOR WALKS/ RIDE BIKE/ PLAY GAMES**

### **4.8 - SPORTS/ DANCE/ EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

## **5 - CHORES**

### **5.1 - TAKE CARE OF YOUNGER SIBLINGS**

### **5.2 - TAKE CARE OF PETS/ GARDEN/ PLANTS**

### **5.3 - TAKE CARE OF ONE'S THINGS/ CLEAN UP AFTER PLAY/ CLEAN UP ROOM**

#### **5.3.1 - MAKE BED/ ORGANISE CLOTHES**

#### **5.3.2 - ORGANISE TOYS/ BOOKS**

### **5.4 - HELP TAKE CARE OF ONE'S THINGS/ CLEAN UP AFTER PLAY/ CLEAN UP ROOM**

#### **5.4.1 - HELP MAKE BED/ ORGANISE CLOTHES**

#### **5.4.2 - HELP ORGANISE TOYS/ BOOKS**

### **5.5 - DO HOUSEWORK**

#### **5.5.1 - SET/ CLEAN UP TABLE**

#### **5.5.2 - PREPARE MEALS/ DO DISHES/ SMALL SHOPPING**

#### **5.5.3 - EMPTY RUBBISH/ SWEEP**

### **5.6 - HELP DO HOUSEWORK**

#### **5.6.1 - HELP SET/ CLEAN UP TABLE**

#### **5.6.2 - HELP PREPARE MEALS/ DO DISHES/ SMALL SHOPPING**

#### **5.6.3 - HELP EMPTY RUBBISH/ SWEEP**

## **6 - PHYSICAL + MATERIAL CONDITIONS (RIGHT TO HAVE + DUTY TO KEEP)**

### **6.1 - GENERAL**

### **6.2 - APPROPRIATE BUILDINGS (SCHOOL/ HOUSE)**

### **6.3 - CLASSROOM**

### **6.4 - PLAYGROUND/ SPORTS GROUND/ SPACE TO PLAY**

### **6.5 - W.C.**

### **6.6 - REFECTORY/ SCHOOL MEALS**

- 6.7 - EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS**
- 6.8 - USE COMMON SPACE**
- 6.9 - MONEY/ ALLOWANCE**
- 6.10 - GIFTS/ SWEETS**

## **7 - PARTICIPATION**

- 7.1 - GENERAL**
- 7.2 - GIVE OPINION/ PROPOSE CHANGES/ EXPRESS ONESELF/ SPEAK OUT**
- 7.3 - CHOOSING/ MAKING DECISIONS/ TASTES RESPECTED**
- 7.4 - PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITIES**
- 7.5 - INFORMATION**
- 7.6 - LISTEN/ TALK TO PARENTS/ TIME FROM PARENTS**
- 7.7 - CRITICISE/ EXPRESS DOUBTS/ QUESTION**

## **8 - DISCIPLINE + OBEDIENCE**

- 8.1 - GENERAL**
- 8.2 - BEHAVING**
- 8.3 - NOT FIGHT/ NOT HIT**
- 8.4 - BE REPREHENDED/ CORRECTED**
- 8.5 - APOLOGISE/ FORGIVE**

## **9 - LOVE + CARE**

- 9.1 - GENERAL**
- 9.2 - UNDERSTANDING/ TOLERANCE**
- 9.3 - ATTENTION**
- 9.4 - TENDERNESS/ BE GENTLE/ BE NICE**
- 9.5 - STIMULATED/ CHEERED/ VALUED**
- 9.6 - SUPPORT**
- 9.7 - HAVE WISHES GRANTED**

## **10 - OBEDIENCE**

- 10.1 - BE OBEDIENT**
- 10.2 - FOLLOW RULES**
- 10.3 - DO WHAT IS TOLD**



## **11 - RESPONSIBILITY**

- 11.1 - BE RESPONSIBLE**
- 11.2 - BE ORGANISED**
- 11.3 - PUNCTUALITY**
- 11.4 - ASSIDUITY**
- 11.5 - FOLLOW TIMETABLE**

## **12 - FRIENDSHIP**

- 12.1 - GENERAL**
  - 12.1.1 - BE FRIENDS WITH TEACHER**
  - 12.1.2 - BE FRIENDS WITH PARENTS**
  - 12.1.3 - BE FRIENDS WITH AUXILIARY STAFF**
- 12.2 - HAVE FRIENDS**

## **13 - HELP**

- 13.1 - BE HELPFUL/ BE HELPED**
- 13.2 - TEAMWORK**
- 13.3 - CO-OPERATION**
- 13.4 - CO-OPERATION WITH PARENTS**
- 13.5 - CO-OPERATION WITH TEACHERS**
- 13.6 - CO-OPERATION WITH COLLEAGUES/ BE A GOOD COLLEAGUE**
- 13.7 - CO-OPERATION WITH AUXILIARY STAFF**
- 13.8 - CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER**
- 13.9 - SHARING**
- 13.10 - SOLIDARITY**

## **14 - INDIVIDUALITY**

- 14.1 - GENERAL**
- 14.2 - PRIVACY/ OWN SPACE**
- 14.3 - TO BE DIFFERENT**
- 14.4 - NON-DISCRIMINATION/ EQUALITY**
- 14.5 - OWN CHARACTERISTICS/ PERSONALITY**
- 14.6 - TO BE A CHILD/ TO THINGS ACCORDING TO AGE**
- 14.7 - INDEPENDENCE/ AUTONOMY**

## **15 - SOCIAL/ MORAL DEVELOPMENT + FORMATION**

**15.1 - GENERAL**

**15.2 - FREEDOM**

**15.3 - GOOD FUTURE/ BE PREPARED FOR LIFE**

**15.4 - JUSTICE/ FAIRNESS**

**15.5 - DEFEND ONESELF/ PROTEST**

**15.6 - CITIZENSHIP**

**15.7 - GOOD VALUES/ TRUTHFUL/ HONEST/ LOYAL/ THANKFUL/  
HUMBLE**

**15.8 - PROFIT FROM WHAT IS OFFERED**

**15.9 - INTEGRATION/ SOCIALISATION**

## **16 - ALL**

**16.1 - ALL**

**16.2 - CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**



**Appendix 5:**

**Completed sample of observation schedule**

CONTEXT

Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ Display: Ind ☐ Pair ☐  
Gp ☐ U ☐

Class beginning ☐ Maths ☐ Port.Lang. ☐ Est. 1/2 ☐ Express. ☐ Play ☐ Class end ☐  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:  
P2 foes with A. and T. (SEN) to the library 'so that they can concentrate on reading until the break, 'cos here they can't concentrate'.

Min	Code	Interaction
1		P asks loud and writes down the sandwiches Children start seating 'J. is going to sit down properly' N.: 'teacher, what about the date?' (PN writes it down on blackboard) (Julia has come next to PN) 'What do you want, J.?' J: 'To take down the sandwiches' (PN writes it down, J. waits) (Children start talking)
2		(PN still writing down) 'What's all this? What's all this noise?.. Take out your Portuguese books so that we can study our little lesson' J. (loud): 'I know which one!' PN (loud): "Talk quietly!" M. comes to show her book to PN (to show she knows what page)
3		children take out their books and talk amongst them PN: 'A., you are not here, go back to your place!' (A. is seating next to M.) M: 'but...' PN: "No more talk, M. She knows that she's not here and you know it too!" (A. goes back to her place) PN: 'Right! Let's get this straight' (so that children arrange their desks)
4		PN arranges desks N.: 'Ma. is missing...' PN (to herself): 'This is a disgrace: they keep missing, missing, missing' PN: 'Let's do something: A. is going to move further back' (A. does it) PN: 'And so is J.L.' (he doesn't move) PN: 'J.L., J.L., move back, aren't you listening to me?' (pushes him back) PN: 'You seem to be an idiot!' Pe. and J.F. arrange their desk too
5		PN moves back to her desk and picks up registry PN: 'I'm going to do the call out' (starts calling) Each child says 'present' Other children start saying it too PN: 'It's only the one I call, that answers! I'm listening to more than one: don't start being silly!' J.L. (when his name is called) 'I'm here' PN looks at him (angry) 'You have to be like everybody else: no more and no less' (implying that he should say 'present' as well)



6	<p>N. is talking (incomprehensible) PN: 'Shut up immediately!' J.: 'Teacher, you didn't call me...' (true) PN: 'Yes, I did' PN: "Right: So, today we are going to look at our little lesson about the 'h'" (shows page on the book) PN: 'Now we are going to look at words that are written with 'h'. But the 'h' is not to be read...</p>
7	<p>(PN interrupts her explanation) PN: 'Now it's for you to be still and listening: Who is talking? (looks around) PN: Shut up M.!' (PN writes different sorts of 'h' on the blackboard) PN: (quickly) 'There are many words that begin with 'h'. In fact the 'h' isn't doing anything there but we have to write it otherwise we have a spelling mistake"</p>
8	<p>(children have settled down and are looking at PN or the book) PN: 'This is already given, now you just have to study... PN: Have you all done the lesson I sent to do at home?' Children: Yeeeeeeeeesss! J.L.: 'I haven't' "Right, you have been going fishing a lot with your father, isn't it?" J.L. (No answer)</p>
9	<p>D.: 'I don't have a pencil...' PN: 'Yes, I would be surprised if you had one... (PN fetches him one from shelf): there are lots here that you leave behind. Take it' PN goes back to the front of the class and shows book PN: 'You have there a music instrument which is a 'harp' ['harpa' in Portuguese] (writes it on blackboard) PN: 'Now you have to write... To complete or to write underneath' (children write on book)</p>
10	<p>PN: 'Is that done?' (no answer. Children write on book) (PN: shows book again) 'What is this? A helix' ['hélice' in Portuguese] (writes it on blackboard) N.: I have one of those! PN: 'Where? Do you have a little airplane?' N.: No, I have one of those like this (rubs hands to make flying movement) PN.: 'Oh, right...' (PN shows book) 'Then we have there the anthem' ['hino' in Portuguese] (writes it on blackboard) PN: 'You know the national anthem, don't you? (no answer) You have to learn it'</p>

Comments:

Class continues to look into further 'h' examples. Following the same system.

**Appendix 6:**

**Coding system for observation schedule**



**Subjects:**

- P – Teacher (code WHO:10 or WHOM:1)
- C – Child (code WHO:20 or WHOM:2)
- T – Class (code WHO:30 or WHOM:3)
- G – Group (code WHO:40 or WHOM:4)
- P2 – Support teacher (code WHO:50 or WHOM:5)

**Interaction categories (WHAT):**

**Class Management (M)**

M ORDER (code 100)	there is an order ‘impossible to refuse’, e.g. ‘pick up your exercise books’.
M CONSULT (code 200)	there is consultation or involvement on issues regarding class management, e.g. ‘who would like to distribute the exercise books?’
M QUESTION (code 300)	direct question requiring solution, ‘e.g. may I go to the bathroom?’ or ‘can I have a pencil?’
M EXPRESS (code 400)	result of ‘M CONSULT’ or a spontaneous expression of opinion, e.g. ‘maybe now we could collect the rubbish’
M ANSWER (code 4000)	answer as result of ‘M QUESTION’, e.g. ‘yes, you may go to the bathroom’.

**Behaviour (B)**

B CONTROL (code 500)	direct behaviour control, e.g. ‘I want everybody quiet now’.
B RULE (code 600)	indirect behaviour control through remembering the explicit or implicit class rules, e.g. ‘our rules say that we don’t eat inside the classroom’ or ‘when someone is reading aloud we have to be silent’.
B ENCOURAGE (code 700)	a positive comment / encouragement / praise about behaviour, e.g. ‘today everybody is behaving beautifully’.
B NEGATIVE (code 800)	explicitly negative comment about behaviour / telling off / raised tone of voice, e.g. ‘shut up! You’re always the same!’
B EXPRESS (code 900)	an opinion is expressed with regards to a behavioural issue, e.g. ‘maybe if we would be quiet until the break, we could leave a little bit earlier’.

**Curriculum (C)**

C ORDER (code 1000)	there is an order ‘impossible to refuse’ regarding the curriculum, e.g. ‘read this text’ or ‘do this calculation’
C INSTRUCTION (code 1100)	direct teaching activities or explaining a subject, e.g. ‘the solar system comprises 9 planets’
C CONSULT (code 1200)	soliciting an opinion about the subject, e.g. ‘can you try to imagine how the rain is formed?’
C QUESTION (code 1300)	direct question related with the curriculum, ‘e.g. how many is 3+2?’ or ‘in which continent is Portugal situated?’
C ASSESS (code 1400)	assessment / attribution of a value to an answer, ‘that’s correct, you’ll have a B+’.
C ENCOURAGE (code 1500)	a positive comment / encouragement / praise related with the curriculum, e.g. ‘that’s great! You already know how to multiply with two numbers’.
C NEGATIVE (code 1600)	explicitly negative comment about curriculum / telling off / raised tone of voice, e.g. ‘your exercise is all wrong. And do you know why? Because you don’t study a thing!’
C EXPRESS (code 1700)	result of ‘C CONSULT’ or a spontaneous expression of opinion / reasoning with regards to the curriculum, e.g. ‘I think that the rain is born in the clouds’
C ANSWER (code 1800)	direct answer to ‘C QUESTION’ or regarding the curriculum, e.g. ‘3+2 equals 5’.
C COOPERATIVE (code 1900)	mutual help between children / tutoring / cooperative learning, e.g. ‘will you help me with this question?’

**Non-interactive categories**

NO ANSWER (code 2000)	an intervention remains unanswered or is ignored
MANAGEMENT TASK (code 2100)	non-interactive management tasks, e.g. wiping the black-board
ASSESSMENT TASK (code 2200)	non-interactive assessment tasks, e.g. teacher corrects children’s exercise books alone on her desk or children do a written self-assessment sheet individually
CURRICULAR TASK (code 2300)	non-interactive curricular task, e.g. children individually do an exercise, write on their books, read silently
OFF-TASK (code 2400)	moment off-task / distraction / transition

**Extra category**

HUMOUR (code 2500)	joke, humorous comment, laughter
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The original explanations were in Portuguese. The current ones constitute a translated and abbreviated version of the original.

Although some categories are more often used by teachers and others by pupils it is assumed that any type of participant could use any category, that being the reason why no subject is indicated.

Furthermore, it is possible to create a single code that would define one specific interaction, e.g. the teacher tells a pupil to pick up his book; i.e. a teacher (WHO: code 10) + giving a management order (WHAT: M ORDER = code 100) + to a pupil (WHOM: code 2) = 112. This specific interaction would, therefore, be coded as 112.

Further coding in the data bank allows also to indicate whether the child in question was a boy or a girl; if he/ she was designated as having SEN; and also which specific child it was as each child was given a different number in the class.

Apart from B ENCOURAGE (code 700), of which no instance was observed, all the examples provided constituted real interactions actually observed in the classrooms.

## **Appendix 7:**

### **Set of indicators of granted and exercised participation in primary school**



## Element 1: Universality of the right and its exercise – Background indicators

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Individual level
BU5	Freeman, 1992b	Documentary	Is participation considered as a right for children?	School's educational project	The school's educational project refers to participation as a right / as a principle.	✓		
BU1	Freeman, 1992b	Head's perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Interview	1 - The head refers to 'participation' when asked about children's rights / 2 - calls it a right when asked about participation / 3 - the rights alluded to include elements of the natural view on participation.	✓		
BU2	Freeman, 1992b	Teachers' perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Interviews	1 - Teachers refer to 'participation' when asked about children's rights / 2 - call it a right when asked about participation / 3 - the rights referred include elements of the natural view on participation.	✓	✓	
BU3	Freeman, 1992b	Children's perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Interviews	1 - Children refer to 'participation' when asked about children's rights / 2 - call it a right when asked about participation / 3 - the rights alluded to include elements of the natural view on participation.	✓	✓	✓
BU4	Freeman, 1992b	Parents' perceptions	Is participation considered as a right for children?	Questionnaires	1 - Parents indicate 'participation' as a right / 2 - the rights alluded to include elements of the natural view on participation (i.e. Please refer to parents' questionnaires coding themes: participation and individuality)	✓		✓
BU6	Hameline, Jornot & Belkaïd, 1995	Documentary	Does the school subscribe to an educational movement endorsing participation ideals? If yes, which?	School's educational project	Specific references in the school's educational project.	✓		
BU7	Reflection; Hameline, Jornot & Belkaïd, 1995	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers belong to or identify with an educational movement endorsing participation ideals? If yes, which?	Interviews	Specific references in interviews.	✓	✓	
BU8	Interviews; Meirieu, 1992	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers value 'active' pedagogies?	Interviews	Specific references in interviews. I.e. stating an identification with pedagogies that concentrate on children developing / performing the educational activity OR considering that the educational activity should be primarily developed by the teacher.	✓	✓	
BU9	Hart et al., 1996	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray participation as a fundamental aspect of their practice?	Interviews	Teachers state it specifically OR on the contrary, mention waiving participation for any reason (e.g. lack of material conditions; being 'too much trouble').	✓	✓	
BU10	Interviews	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray themselves as capable of working in a participation-oriented way?	Interviews	Teachers refer to their practice as participation-oriented OR state that they 'don't like' or 'would be incapable / unable to work in such way'.	✓	✓	
BU11	Reflection	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers present a non-limited view on participation?	Interviews	Teachers mention a range of participation-related elements when asked about what participation encompasses OR refer to it mostly as 'paying attention and answering questions', a more common understanding of the expression within Portuguese schools context.	✓	✓	

## Element 1: Universality of the right and its exercise – Background indicators (cont.)

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Individual level
BU13	Reflection	Children's perceptions	Do children portray teachers in participation-oriented situations?	Interviews	Type of activity referred to in interview, e.g. teachers portrayed as creating participative situations for pupils OR described as developing non-participative activities.	✓	✓	✓
BU12	Reflection	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils in participation situations?	Interviews	Specific references in interviews, e.g. pupils portrayed as being active in the classroom OR pupils portrayed as just 'doing as told'.	✓	✓	✓
BU14	Reflection	Children's perceptions	Do children consider their current participation as positive?	Questionnaires	Please refer to participation scale: Average results above OR below 2 (cutting point for a negative answer).	✓	✓	✓
BU15	Reflection	Children's perceptions	Does children's perceived current participation meet up with their desired participation?	Questionnaires	Please refer to years 3 and 4 participation scale: relation between 'importance of participation' scale (i.e. average desired participation) and 'actual participation' scale (i.e. average actual participation). 'actual participation' $\geq$ 'desired participation' (positive) OR 'actual participation' $<$ 'desired participation' (negative).	✓	✓	✓
BU16	Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997	Children's perceptions	Do children make claims for a more participation-oriented / active school?	Interviews	Children make specific claims for a more participation-oriented / active school OR mention being satisfied with their current level of participation	✓	✓	✓
BU17 A, B, C	Reflection	Children's perceptions	Do children perceive their participation as similar in different moments?	Questionnaires	Please refer to participation scales: Comparison between questions referring to Decision-making (17A), Teaching and Learning Tasks (17B) and Assessment (17C). All areas revealing a positive average ( $> 2$ ) OR some showing a negative average ( $\leq 2$ ), revealing discrepancies between areas of perceived participation.	✓	✓	✓
BU18	Osler, 1998	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation?	School: informal observation notes	Referring to school: e.g. suggestion boxes, school councils.	✓		
BU19	Alderson, 1999; Gersch, 1992	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Referring to classes: e.g. self-assessment sheets, choice of worksheets.	✓	✓	



## Element 1: Universality of the right and its exercise – Event-related indicators

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
U1	Hart & Schwab, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997	Observable	Is the activity part of everyday school life?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: observation schedules	E.g. it is a curricular OR a 'one-off' event / extra-curricular activity (e.g. a party; a play; an exhibition).	✓	✓	
U2	Alderson, 1999	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation in the activity?	School: informal observation notes	Referring to school: e.g. suggestion boxes, school councils.	✓		
U3	Alderson, 1999	Observable	Are there mechanisms / structures for child participation in the activity?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Referring to classes: e.g. self-assessment sheets, choice of worksheets.	✓	✓	
U4	Hart & Schwab, 1997	Observable	Are children intervening in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	Percentage of child-initiated interactions, <i>i.e. WHO = 20, 30, 40</i>	✓	✓	✓
U5	Council of Europe, 1996	Observable	Does the activity involve children being informed?	Classroom: observation schedules	A situation in which information is passed on but feed-back not necessarily expected (Please refer to observation schedules coding: Teachers: MEXPRESS, BEXPRESS, CEXPRESS), <i>i.e.</i> 410, 910, 1710	✓	✓	✓
U6	Council of Europe, 1996	Observable	Does the activity involve children being consulted?	Classroom: observation schedules	A situation in which information is passed on and feed-back is expected (Please refer to observation schedules coding: Teachers: MCONSULT, CCONSULT), <i>i.e.</i> 210, 1210	✓	✓	✓
U7	Hodgkin & Newell, 1999	Observable	Does the activity involve children giving their opinion?	Classroom: observation schedules	Spontaneous uttering about the issue under discussion 'without coercion nor constraint' (Please refer to observation schedules coding: Children: MEXPRESS, BEXPRESS, CEXPRESS) 420, 430, 440, 920, 930, 940, 1720, 1730, 1740	✓	✓	✓
U9	Brandes & Ginnis, 1986, 1994	Observable	Is there a low incidence of direct instruction from the teacher?	Classroom: observation schedules	Percentage of teacher-initiated interactions, <i>i.e.</i> WHO = 10.	✓	✓	
U10	Pridmore, 2000	Observable	Do children do instruction / present their work to the class?	Classroom: observation schedules + informal observation notes	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Percentage of: CINSTRUCTION from children, <i>i.e.</i> 1120, 1130, 1140	✓	✓	✓
U11	Kagan, 1992	Observable	Is there a low incidence of children's individual tasks?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Percentage of: TASKMAN, TASKKASSESS, TASKCURR, <i>i.e.</i> 2120, 2130, 2140, 2220, 2230, 2240, 2320, 2330, 2340	✓	✓	✓

Element 1: Universality of the right and its exercise – Event-related indicators (cont.)

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
U12	Reflection	Observable	Do children maintain their participation in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Low percentage of OFFTASK, i.e. 2420, 2430, 2440	✓	✓	✓
U13 A p,n (420) B p,n (920) C p,n (1720) D p,n (320) E p,n (1320) F p,n (total)	Reflection	Observable	Do child-initiated interactions have a positive impact in the unfolding of the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules + qualitative analysis	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Percentage of: children's A - MEXPRESS (420), B - BEXPRESS (920), C - CEXPRESS (1720) or D - MQUESTION (320), E - CQUESTION (1320) followed by teachers positive (e.g. supportive answer, encouragement) OR negative reaction (no answer, negative comment).	✓	✓	✓
U15 A (DM) B (TLT) C (Assess)	Reflection	Observable	Is the level of participation maintained similar in different moments?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Compare results of behaviours associated with A- Decision-Making: 100, 200, 400 B- Teaching and learning tasks:300, 4000, 1000, 1100, 1200, 1700, 1800, 1900, 2100, 2300 C-Assessment: 500, 600, 700, 800, 900, 1300, 1400, 1500, 1600, 2200	✓	✓	✓



**Element 2: Non-discrimination in the access to participation – Background indicators**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BD20	Verhellen, 1993	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers refer to non-discrimination in access to participation as a principle?	Interviews	Teachers mention a concern that all children participate on equal terms OR mention awarding different levels of participation to different children e.g. according to perceived capability / academic status.	✓	✓	
BD21	Interviews	Children's perceptions	Do children portray everybody participating in the classroom and not only the 'good' pupils?	Interviews	Children mention having an equal chance of participating OR describe situations in which there is discrimination regarding participation in favour of 'good' pupils.	✓	✓	✓
BD24	Lansdown, 2001	Parents' perceptions	Do parents attribute similar participation rights to younger and older children?	Questionnaires	Comparison of questionnaire results amongst the different year groups: years 1, 2 and years 3, 4	✓		✓
BD25	Hart <i>et al.</i> , 1997	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray children designated as having SEN as capable of participation in similar terms to those of other children?	Interviews	Teachers make specific references / describe them as progressing / in favourable terms regarding their participation OR there is a use of patronising stances / they are described as irrecoverable / as stagnating, and therefore basing their non-capability for participation on these criteria.	✓	✓	✓
BD26	Interviews; reflection	Teachers' perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as being fully part of the class?	Interviews	Teachers refer to them as 'their own students' OR 'belonging to the support teacher' / 'they should be removed from the classroom'.	✓	✓	✓
BD27	Interviews; reflection	Children's perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as being fully part of the class?	Interviews	Children purport them in the classroom, with other students OR out of the classroom / provide a negative image.	✓	✓	✓
BD28	Interviews; reflection	Teachers' perceptions	Is the support teacher portrayed as non-exclusive for the children designated as having SEN?	Interviews	Teachers describe support teacher as working with the whole class / supporting the class teacher OR describe them as FOR the children designated as having SEN.	✓	✓	✓
BD29	Interviews; reflection	Children's perceptions	Is the support teacher portrayed as non-exclusive for the children designated as having SEN?	Interviews	Children describe support teacher as working with the whole class / supporting the class teacher OR describe them as FOR the children designated as having SEN.	✓	✓	✓
BD30	Interviews; reflection	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers state that children designated as having SEN should do the same work / work on the same subject as the rest of the class?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews: stating a belief that not doing so would be counterproductive for the child's development / learning OR stating a belief that the children designated as having SEN are 'too different' to work in the same way / need 'special' interventions.	✓	✓	✓
BD31	Interviews; reflection	Children's perceptions	Are children designated as having SEN portrayed as doing the same work / working on the same subject as the rest of the class?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews OR stating a belief that the children designated as having SEN are 'too different' to work in the same way / need 'special' interventions.	✓	✓	✓
BD32 A (SEN) B (NO SEN)	Verhellen, 1993	Children's perceptions	Do children designated as having SEN have a perception of their participation similar to that of children designated as 'normal'?	Questionnaires	Please refer to participation scale: Comparison of participation scale results amongst children designated as having SEN and children designated as 'normal' A: SEN results above OR below the class' average B: SEN results above OR below 'no SEN' average	✓	✓	✓

**Element 2: Non-discrimination in the access to participation – Event-related indicators**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
D16	Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997; Hart & Schwab, 1997	Observable	Is the activity, by its nature, accessible to all children?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: observation schedules	All children would hypothetically have the same probability of being part of it OR certain circumstances (e.g. physical accessibility, language used, etc.) render it inaccessible to some.	✓	✓	✓
D17	Hodgkin & Newell, 1999;	Observable	Are provisions taken to insure non-discrimination?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: observation schedules	If the activity, by its nature, is not accessible to all, there are manipulations of the environment or the task / activity itself in order to render it accessible OR no such arrangements are put in place.	✓	✓	
D18 A (SEN) B (%50%) C (+ participative child)	Reflection	Observable	Do children have a similar level of participation in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	A: comparison of number of actual child-initiated interactions with probability (namely for children designated as having SEN). Are some children monopolising the interactions? B: Percentage of children that account for at least 50% of the child-initiated interactions. C: Percentage of the total child-initiated interactions that is occupied by the most participative child + his/ her class status.	✓	✓	✓(A)
D19 A (SEN) B (%50%) C (+ participative child)	Reflection + Interviews	Observable	Do teachers vary equitably whom they interact with?	Classroom: observation schedules	A: comparison of actual child-directed interactions compared with probability (namely for children designated as having SEN). Is the teacher concentrating the interactions only on some children? B: Percentage of children that account for at least 50% of the child-directed interactions. C: Percentage of the total child-directed interactions that is occupied by the child who received the most interactions + his/ her class status.	✓	✓	✓(A)
D21	Reflection	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN have the same seating arrangements as the rest of the class / group?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Immediate verification by observation. There is no difference OR there is a physical separation (e.g. a different group of desks; a desk next to the teacher's, etc.)	✓	✓	✓
D22	Reflection	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN remain in the classroom / with the rest of the group at all times?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Immediate verification by observation. Children designated as having SEN always present OR taken out of the classroom for separate education	✓	✓	✓
D23	Interviews	Observable	Do the support teachers work with children, other than those designated as having SEN?	Classroom: informal observation notes +observation schedules	Support teachers' interacts with non-SEN children OR exclusively with the children designated as having SEN + Observation of the classroom's disposition (e.g. support teacher exclusively next to children designated as having SEN; back turned to the rest of the classroom).	✓	✓	✓
D24	Hodgkin & Newell, 1999	Observable	Do children designated as having SEN do the same work / work on the same subject as the rest of the class?	Classroom: informal observation notes +observation schedules	Immediate verification by observation: same work (even if with adaptations) OR non-related work / subject.	✓	✓	✓



Element 3: Non-traditional conception of children and childhood – Background indicators

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BN33	Hart & Schwab, 1997	Documentary	Do the expectations regarding children in the school's educational project coincide with a non-traditional conception of children and childhood?	School's educational project	Expressions concentrating in children as whole persons, e.g. calling them 'children' / focusing on areas other than academic OR regarding in majority school work e.g. calling them 'pupils' / portraying a traditional organisation of learning.	✓		
BN35	Pridmore, 2000	Teachers' perceptions	Are children portrayed beyond their role as learners?	Interviews	Explicit reference indicating a conception of children as whole persons OR solely / mostly as pupils / in an academic role.	✓	✓	✓
BN34	Holden & Clough, 1998	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general described in positive terms?	Interviews	All children described in positive terms (not only 'good' pupils) OR negative expressions in teachers' interviews (e.g. 'nowadays they're not as good as they used to be'; 'they're badly behaved').	✓	✓	✓
BN36	John, 1998; Wood, 1998; Lewis, 1996	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general described as competent / capable?	Interviews	Teachers' expressions regarding the generality of children: 'capable', 'autonomous' etc. OR children described in patronising terms / only 'good' pupils described as capable.	✓	✓	✓
BN37	John, 1998; Wood, 1998; Lewis, 1996	Children's perceptions	Do children describe pupils as competent / capable?	Interviews	Positive (e.g. success in class) OR negative description regarding capability (e.g. being considered unfit for a task).	✓	✓	✓
BN38	John, 1998; Wood, 1998; Lewis, 1996	Children's perceptions	Do children purport teachers' opinion about pupils as competent / capable subjects?	Interviews	Positive (e.g. success in class) OR negative description regarding capability (e.g. being considered unfit for a task).	✓	✓	✓
BN51	Hart & Schwab, 1997	Teachers' perceptions	Is autonomy referred to as a value?	Interviews	Specific references by the teachers OR description of a patronising status.	✓	✓	✓
BN52	Observation + children's interviews	Observable	Are children given meaningful 'responsibilities'?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Teachers awarding them to children while stressing their capability OR just because it's practical + Type of responsibilities given: actual functioning of the class OR merely management.	✓	✓	✓
BN39	Cantwell, 1992 referring to Convention on the Rights of the Child	Teachers' perceptions	Are children portrayed as subjects of rights?	Interviews	Teachers describe children as capable of exercising them (self-exercisable) OR as objects of rights (non-exercisable by themselves) / do not mention any rights.	✓	✓	✓
BN40	Owen & Tarr, 1998	Documentary	Are children awarded primarily rights?	School's educational plan	The elements contained in it are formulated mostly in terms of 'the pupils being allowed to...' / 'having the right to...' OR 'must do...' / 'should be able to...'	✓		
BN41	Owen & Tarr, 1998	Teachers' perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	Interviews	When asked about children's rights and responsibilities, teachers refer a higher frequency of rights than responsibilities OR 'forget' to mention any rights / insist mainly on responsibilities.	✓	✓	✓
BN42	Owen & Tarr, 1998	Parents' perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	Questionnaires	Comparison of frequencies: Parents attribute more rights OR more responsibilities to children	✓		✓

**Element 3: Non-traditional conception of children and childhood – Background indicators (cont.)**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BN43	Owen & Tarr, 1998	Children's perceptions	Are children awarded primarily rights?	Interviews	When asked about children's rights and responsibilities, children refer a higher frequency of rights than responsibilities OR 'forget' to mention any rights / insist mainly on responsibilities.	✓	✓	✓
BN50 A (N-T) B (T)	Questionnaires + Convention on the Rights of the Child	Parents' perceptions	Do parents refer more to 'non-traditional' rights than traditional ones?	Questionnaires	Please refer to the parents' questionnaires' coding themes: Percentage of: leisure, participation, individuality OR Percentage of: insisting solely / mostly on education, well-being, physical / material conditions, love & care (thus portraying a more patronising view).	✓		✓
BN44	Wood, 1998	Teachers' perceptions	Are children awarded attitudinal respect?	Interviews	Specific reference to respecting children OR just being respected by children / children owing respect to adults.	✓	✓	✓
BN45 A (R) B (D)	Wood, 1998	Parents' perceptions	Are children awarded attitudinal respect?	Questionnaires	Please refer to the parents' questionnaires' coding themes: 'Respect' referred to mostly as a right (A) OR as a duty (B)	✓		✓
BN49	Interviews	Children's perceptions	Do children portray as unfair / incorrect for the teacher to tell pupils off?	Interviews	When relating such occasions they portray a 'children's solidarity' OR sustain the teacher's position / identify with teacher (e.g. if the teacher tells us off it's because we behave badly).	✓	✓	✓
BN46	Murphy-Berman et al., 1996; Portugal's report, 1997	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers portray their relationship with the children as non-hierarchical?	Interviews	Teachers state it specifically OR rather stress values such as being respectful, obedience, discipline, etc.	✓	✓	✓
BN47	Questionnaires + Convention on the Rights of the Child	Parents' perceptions	Do parents portray their relationship with the children as non-hierarchical?	Questionnaires	Please refer to the parents' questionnaires coding themes: Low OR high incidence of 'traditional-hierarchical' duties: being respectful, doing chores, discipline, obedience, being helpful	✓		✓
BN48	Murphy-Berman et al., 1996	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils- teachers relationships as non-hierarchical?	Interviews	Children portray pupils as being able to discuss issues on equal terms with teachers OR as having no possibility of intervention / 'adults know best' / In the duties mentioned children mimic hierarchical values: 'obedience', 'discipline'...	✓	✓	✓
BN53	Interviews	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers conceive learning mostly as fun?	Interviews	Specific references in interviews. E.g. in insisting on the importance of interesting / fun activities to catch children's attention OR insisting on the importance of 'serious' work before having the fun activities.	✓	✓	
BN54	Interviews	Teachers' perceptions	Are children in general portrayed as enjoying school?	Interviews	Specific references to school as interesting for all children OR references in the opposite sense / regarding only some children.	✓	✓	✓



**Element 3: Non-traditional conception of children and childhood – Event-related indicators**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
N25	Observation + children's interviews	Observable	Are children given meaningful 'responsibilities' within the activity?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Teachers awarding them to children while stressing the their capability OR just because it's practical + Type of responsibilities given: actual functioning of the class OR merely management.	✓	✓	✓
N26 A (positive) B (negative)	Reflection	Observable	Is the incidence of positive encouragement higher than that of negative remarks?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Compare A: (BENCOURAGE, CENCOURAGE), i.e. 700, 1500 with B: (BCONTROL, BNEGATIVE, CNEGATIVE), i.e.500, 800, 1600	✓	✓	✓
N27	Lansdown, 2001 + Holden & Clough, 1998	Observable	Are children enabled and encouraged to contribute their views on relevant matters?	Classroom: observation schedules + qualitative information	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Specific references BENCOURAGE, CENCOURAGE – qualitative information on the incentive given by teacher, e.g. 'I want to have everybody's opinion'; 'your opinion is important' OR being patronising 'oh you poor thing, that's alright'.	✓	✓	✓
N28	Meirieu, 1992	Observable	Do the teachers plunge into the common experience when developing the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules + qualitative information	Qualitative information – the teacher systematically picks up what the children mention and integrates it in the lesson.	✓	✓	✓
N29 A p.n (420) B p.n (920) C p.n (1720) D p.n (total)	Holden & Clough, 1998 + Reflection	Observable	Do teachers act upon suggestions of the children?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Percentage of: children's A - MEXPRESS (420), B - BEXPRESS (920), C - CEXPRESS (1720) followed by teachers' positive (e.g. supportive answer, encouragement; building on the suggestion) OR negative reaction (no answer, negative comment).	✓	✓	✓
N30	Observation (added to coding list)	Observable	Does humour have an incidence in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Presence of (HUMOUR)? I.e. 2500	✓	✓	✓

**Element 3: Non-traditional conception of children and childhood – Event-related indicators**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
N25	Observation + children's interviews	Observable	Are children given meaningful 'responsibilities' within the activity?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Teachers awarding them to children while stressing the their capability OR just because it's practical + Type of responsibilities given: actual functioning of the class OR merely management.	✓	✓	✓
N26 A (positive) B (negative)	Reflection	Observable	Is the incidence of positive encouragement higher than that of negative remarks?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Compare A: (BENCOURAGE, CENCOURAGE), i.e. 700, 1500 with B: (BCONTROL, BNEGATIVE, CNEGATIVE), i.e.500, 800, 1600	✓	✓	✓
N27	Lansdown, 2001 + Holden & Clough, 1998	Observable	Are children enabled and encouraged to contribute their views on relevant matters?	Classroom: observation schedules + qualitative information	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Specific references BENCOURAGE, CENCOURAGE – qualitative information on the incentive given by teacher, e.g. 'I want to have everybody's opinion'; 'your opinion is important' OR being patronising 'oh you poor thing, that's alright'.	✓	✓	✓
N28	Meirieu, 1992	Observable	Do the teachers plunge into the common experience when developing the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules + qualitative information	Qualitative information – the teacher systematically picks up what the children mention and integrates it in the lesson.	✓	✓	✓
N29 A p,n (420) B p,n (920) C p,n (1720) D p,n (total)	Holden & Clough, 1998 + Reflection	Observable	Do teachers act upon suggestions of the children?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Percentage of: children's A - MEXPRESS (420), B - BEXPRESS (920), C - CEXPRESS (1720) followed by teachers' positive (e.g. supportive answer, encouragement; building on the suggestion) OR negative reaction (no answer, negative comment).	✓	✓	✓
N30	Observation (added to coding list)	Observable	Does humour have an incidence in the activity?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: Presence of (HUMOUR)? I.e. 2500	✓	✓	✓



Element 4: Participation being beneficial for children – Background indicators

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BP55	Enright & Cox, 1997; Gale et al., 1999; Meirieu, 1992	Teachers' perceptions	Is participation perceived as a good educational tool?	Interviews	Teachers report believing in the educational efficacy of participation / active pedagogies OR there is no particular reference in that sense / state not finding participation a good educational tool.	✓	✓	
BP56	Alderson, 1999	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers conceive that there are specific benefits for children deriving from participation?	Interviews	Teachers mention specific personal development for children because of participation-oriented ethos (e.g. because she knows she can speak freely, she's not as shy as she used to be; participation is good for their motivation and self-esteem) OR there is no specific reference in that sense / teachers mention not considering that there are specific benefits.	✓	✓	✓
BP57	Wood, 1998; Schiefelbein, 1990	Children's perceptions	Is one's perception of participation co-related with one's perception of other skills?	Questionnaires	Please refer to Self-perception profile + participation scale: Participation scales co-related positively with other self-concept scales (global self-esteem and academic self-concept) OR there is no co-relation / there is a weak co-relation.	✓	✓	✓
BP58 A (<) B (=) C (>)	Reflection	Children's perceptions + Observable	Is children's 'perception of participation' similar to their actual participation in the interview?	Questionnaires + children's interviews	Comparison between their relative position in the group in terms of perception of participation (1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> ) and their participation in interview (e.g. 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> in number of utterances) – Please note that this is an ascending order.			✓
BP59	Interviews, Pridmore, 2000	Children's perceptions	Do children demonstrate skills associated with participation? a) being able to identify realistic problems.	Interviews	Children identify realistic problems related with e.g. security and safety, health, material conditions, etc.	✓		✓
BP60	Interviews, Pridmore, 2000; Wood, 1998	Children's perceptions	Do children demonstrate skills associated with participation? b) problem-solving / being able to propose realistic solutions?	Interviews	Children not only identify realistic problems but are able to propose realistic solutions regarding e.g. security and safety, health, material conditions, etc.	✓		✓

Element 4: Participation being beneficial for children – Event-related indicators

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
P31 A (class) 1,2,3 B (quartile) 1,2,3	Reflection	Children's perceptions + Observable	Is children's 'perception of participation' similar to their actual participation in class / the activity?	Questionnaires + observation schedules	Comparison between their relative position in terms of perception of participation (1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> quartile) and their relative position in terms of actual participation in class -number of utterances (1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> quartile) – Please note that this is an ascending order.			✓

**Element 5: Development of democracy and citizenship – Background indicators**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BDC62	Osler & Starkey, 1998; Regis, 1996	Documentary	Is the curriculum based upon participation / democracy / citizenship principles?	School's educational project + curriculum	Specific references to those principles.	✓		
BDC63	Pridmore, 2000	Head's perceptions	Does the head refer to democracy and citizenship as personal concerns?	Interview	Specific reference in interview.	✓		
BDC64	Hart & Zeidner, 1993	Children's perceptions	Do children portray the head as having democracy and citizenship as personal concerns?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in description of the head. E.g. as someone fair / approachable / performing democratic exercises in decision-making OR as autocratic / unapproachable.	✓	✓	✓
BDC65	Ippolitti, 1998	Children's perceptions	Do children portray a democratically run school?	Interviews	Specific references to democratic procedures in interviews OR a portrait of an autocratic management.	✓	✓	✓
BDC66	Pridmore, 2000	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers refer to democracy and citizenship as personal concerns?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference.	✓	✓	
BDC78	Interviews + Nader, 1992	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers envision the school as adequate to children's needs / as a locus of social intervention?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference / solely / mostly academic view.	✓	✓	
BDC79	Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997 + Interviews	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers consider themselves as transmitters of values?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference / solely / mostly academic view.	✓	✓	
BDC68	Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997	Teachers' perceptions	Are democracy / rights seen as values to be taught?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference.	✓	✓	
BDC69	Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997	Teachers' perceptions	Are democracy / rights seen as values to be lived?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference / incomplete response, i.e. only as a value to be taught but not lived.	✓	✓	
BDC67	Hart & Schwab, 1997; Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers perceive children as capable of undertaking democratic procedures?	Interviews	Specific references regarding children's capability OR incapability, e.g. 'I don't do it just yet because they're too young' / 'they don't understand the democratic procedures'.	✓	✓	✓
BDC70	Alderson, 1999; Hodgson, 1996	Teachers' perceptions	Are children considered as citizens in the present?	Interviews	Explicit reference in teachers' interviews considering them as citizen-children now OR just as future citizens.	✓	✓	✓
BDC71	Alderson, 1999; Howard & Gill, 2000	Observable + documentary	Are there democratic processes in which children take part?	School: informal observation notes; school council's minutes; Class: informal observation notes	E.g. elections, votes.	✓	✓	



Element 5: Development of democracy and citizenship – Background indicators (cont.)

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BDC72	Holden, 1998; Nias, 1999; Osler, 1998	Observable	Are there democratic structures in which children take part?	School: informal observation notes; Class: informal observation notes	E.g. School assemblies, school councils + class circle time, class assembly, etc.	✓	✓	
BDC73	Hodgkin & Newell, 1999	Observable	Are there consultation exercises near the students?	School: informal observation notes	E.g. Polls, surveys, etc.	✓		
BDC74	Alderson, 1999	Observable	Are there channels of bottom-up communication?	School: informal observation notes	Suggestion boxes, class diary, etc.	✓	✓	
BDC75	Holden, 1998 +Reflection (for this specific case)	Children's perceptions	Do children propose democratic solutions for decision-making?	Interviews	Reference in that sense, e.g. children propose that decisions should be made through a vote OR portray the head / teachers deciding by themselves.	✓	✓	✓
BDC76	Hogan, 1998	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils as making part of democratic processes?	Interviews	Children portray the processes as accessible to pupils (e.g. in a vote, not only adults involved, but children as well) OR those processes are considered as something exclusive to adults (e.g. kids would get bored in those meetings).	✓	✓	✓
BDC77	Limber <i>et al.</i> , 1999	Children's perceptions	Do children demonstrate knowledge of 'Convention-like' rights?	Interviews	Specific references in interviews (e.g. right to education, health, etc) OR rights mentioned not in line with Convention (e.g. right to have a magical pencil).	✓	✓	✓

Element 5: Development of democracy and citizenship – Event-related indicators

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
DC 33	Holden, 1998; Howard & Gill, 2001	Observable	Is there explicit teaching and learning about democratic processes and citizenship?	Classroom: observation schedules	Qualitative information: e.g. teachers explaining the principles an election	✓	✓	
DC 34	John, 1996 + Reflection	Observable	When children are chosen to participate in the activity, is representativeness an issue?	Classroom: informal observation notes	E.g. children take a vote OR the teachers choose the children.	✓	✓	✓
DC 35	Lansdown, 2001	Observable	Are roles clearly distributed and discussed?	Classroom: observation schedules	Qualitative information: In the course of an activity these are discussed with children / decided with children OR decided by the teacher.	✓	✓	✓
DC 36	Deardoff, 1996; Pridmore, 2000	Observable	Are children allowed non-participation if they wish?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Children have the choice of opting out of the activity with no negative consequences OR there is no choice offered to opt out.	✓	✓	✓

**Element 6: Participation as a powersharing issue – Background indicators**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BPW 80	Osler & Starkey, 1998	Documentary	Are there indications of children taking part in decision-making structures?	School council's minutes	Specific references in the school council's minutes.	✓		
BPW 81	Osler & Starkey, 1998	Observable	Are children part of the school's decision-making structures?	School: informal observation notes;	In the present case, the school council.	✓		
BPW 82	Reflection + Ochaíta & Espinosa, 1997	Observable	Are there processes in which children have the same power as adults?	School: informal observation notes;	Processes in which children are not outnumbered (e.g. equal vote rather than just a consultative role) / the language and the topics allow their participation OR no presence of such processes.	✓	✓	
BPW 83	Halliwell & Williams, 1992	Observable	Are children informed about the programme?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: informal observation notes	School: Children are given and explained the curriculum Classroom: There is a daily plan / summary and children are informed of it OR the teacher goes straight into the subjects / lesson.	✓	✓	
BPW 84	Meirieu, 1992, on Freinet's pedagogy	Observable	Are there work programmes / plans (individual / collective) defined by the pupils?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Immediate verification by observation.	✓	✓	
BPW 97	Gersch, 1992	Documentary + teachers' perceptions	Do parents of children designated as having SEN participate in their assessment procedure?	School Council's minutes + Interviews	Specific reference when assessment procedure is considered OR referred to as being done solely by the teachers.	✓		✓
BPW 98	Gersch, 1992	Documentary + teachers' perceptions	Do children designated as having SEN participate in their assessment procedure?	School Council's minutes + Interviews	Specific reference when assessment procedure is considered OR referred to as being done solely by the teachers.	✓		✓
BPW 85	Reflection	Observable	Do children treat the head in an informal way?	School: informal observation notes	Either on a first-name basis or an informal 'you', which exists in Portuguese.	✓	✓	✓
BPW 86	Reflection	Observable	Do children treat the teacher in an informal way?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Either on a first-name basis or an informal 'you', which exists in Portuguese.	✓	✓	
BPW 87	Interviews	Head's perceptions	Does the head express a positive view on being criticised by the pupils?	Interview + informal conversation	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference.	✓		
BPW 88	Interviews	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers express a positive view on being criticised by the pupils?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference.	✓	✓	
BPW 89	Interviews	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers mention questioning themselves?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference.	✓	✓	
BPW 90	Interviews	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers mention learning from the children too?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / portraying a more patronising view.	✓	✓	
BPW 92	Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Pridmore, 2000	Teachers' perceptions	Do teachers describe themselves mostly as facilitators / moderators?	Interviews	Specific references in interviews (question on role) in that sense OR describing themselves as the 'authority figure' / as 'traditional'.	✓	✓	



**Element 6: Participation as a powersharing issue – Background indicators (cont.)**

Indicators	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
BPW 93	Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Pridmore, 2000	Children's perceptions	Do children portray teachers mostly as facilitators / moderators?	Interviews	Specific references in interviews OR portray fear of the teachers / portray them as authoritarian / as 'ordering them to do things'.	✓	✓	✓
BPW 96	Interviews	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils in power-sharing situations in equality with the teachers?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference / everything decided by teacher.	✓	✓	✓
BPW 1	Sweden's report, 1998	Children's perceptions	Do children portray pupils as having an influence upon the organisation and content of teaching?	Interviews	Children describe pupils in such situations OR in situations controlled mostly by teachers.	✓	✓	✓
BPW 94	Hammersley, 1984; Wood, 1998	Children's perceptions	Do children portray the teacher as providing pupils with choices?	Interviews	Specific reference in interviews in that sense OR in the opposite sense / no reference / situations pre-determined by teacher.	✓	✓	✓

## Element 6: Participation as a powersharing issue – Event-related indicators

	Source	Type of indicator	What to know?	Where to find?	How to know? Operationalisation	School level	Class level	Ind. level
PW39	Interviews	Observable	Are children informed about the programme of the activity?	School: informal observation notes; Classroom: informal observation notes	School: Children are given and explained the curriculum Classroom: There is a daily plan / summary and children are informed of it OR the teacher goes straight into the subjects / lesson.	✓	✓	✓
PW40	Meirieu, 1992, on Freinet's pedagogy	Observable	Are there work programmes / plan (individual / collective) defined by the pupils for the activity?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Immediate verification by observation.	✓	✓	✓
PW38	Reflection + Alderson, 1999; Freeman, 1992	Observable	Are children's complaints taken seriously?	Classroom: informal observation notes	Children make a complaint and adults act upon it / discuss the issue with children OR there is a patronising view / ignoring them because not judged worthy of attention	✓	✓	
PW41	Meirieu, 1992	Observable	Is there non-directive teaching?	Classroom: observation schedules	Presence and frequency of group work (code 40 + 4).	✓	✓	
PW8	Hammersley, 1984; Hodgkin & Newell, 1999; Wood, 1998	Observable	Does the activity involve children making choices?	Classroom: observation schedules	Qualitative information: Being presented with several equivalent options and being able to give course to the one the subject prefers, with no pressure or negative consequences.	✓	✓	
PW42 A (positive) B (negative)	Alderson, 1999	Observable	Does the action stem from joint discussion?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: A) There is a higher incidence of MCONSULT, BRULE, CCONSULT (indicating a tendency towards more powersharing) i.e. 200, 600, 1200 OR B) there is a higher incidence MORDER, BCONTROL, CORDER (non-powersharing strategies) i.e. 100, 500, 1000	✓	✓	✓
PW43 A (question) B (consult)	Alderson, 1999	Observable	Does the activity involve more 'consultation – expression of opinion' sequences than 'question – answer' sequences?	Classroom: observation schedules	Please refer to observation schedules coding: A) Frequency of MQUESTION 310 – MANSWER 4020, 4030, 4040 and CQUESTION 1310– CANSWER 1820, 1830, 1840 B) Frequency of MCONSULT 210 – MEXPRESS 420, 430, 440, CCONSULT 1210 – CEXPRESS 1720, 1730, 1740	✓	✓	✓



## **Appendix 8:**

### **Description of K-means cluster analysis**

Note: The theoretical information on this section can be found at '<http://www.clustan.com>' and '<http://www.statsoftlinc.com>'

Cluster analysis is a statistical tool that proceeds to the partition of a sample into homogeneous classes, which allows for the production of operational classifications. For this reason, and given the object of this study, this technique was judged as suitable to contribute to one of its main goals, i.e. the operationalisation of the concept of 'exercised participation in the school context'. Furthermore, it is also known that, as a statistical method, cluster analysis focuses on the sorting of cases into groups (or clusters). That sorting is done by highlighting the strong degree of association between members of the same group while stressing the degree of differentiation between members of different groups. As the aims of this part of the study were, on the one hand, to identify the characteristics of both 'more' and 'less' participation-oriented contexts and, on the other hand, to try to explain what the differences are between those two types of context, this tool seemed also to be particularly appropriate.

Yet, owing to the fact that at this point in the study there were already hypotheses formulated in the sense of some classes being 'more participation-oriented' and others 'less participation-oriented', the type of cluster analysis considered as suitable for this case was the 'K-means clustering'. This technique, as its name indicates, proceeds to the analysis of means, placing cases in one cluster or the other according to the similarities and differences between them.

This implied that all the results obtained through the application of the set of indicators to the context of Santa Maria school had to be expressed in a format (scale) capable of



creating the ‘means’ that were required for the analysis. As mentioned in chapter 7, these scales were the following:

- 0 / 1: which represent, respectively, a ‘no’ and a ‘yes’;
- 0 / 100: which represent the percentage of the total interactions that was taken up, in a given class, by the specific one mentioned in the indicator;
- 0 / 4: which represent the scales of the Susan Harter’s profiles (Harter, 1985; Harter & Pike, 1984) and the ‘participation scale’;
- 0 / .25 / .5 / .75 / 1: which represent the number of children providing a positive answer during the interviews; respectively 0 = no children; .25 = 1 child; .5 = 2 children; .75 = 3 children; 1 = the four children.

The data which had been represented in this way, were then analysed with the SPSS software. The K-means cluster analysis in this package starts by creating random clusters and then moving cases between those clusters in order to minimise the variability within each cluster and maximise the variability amongst the different clusters. In terms of interpretation, it was then necessary to examine the means of each cluster for each of the indicators and discuss how the differences in results might help both characterise and distinguish the more and less participation-oriented classes. This constituted the object of chapter 7.

When children’s individual results (chapter 8) were considered it seemed justified, however, to proceed to the K-means analysis through the creation of four clusters. This was for several reasons:

- to keep in line (and make comparisons) with the procedure used in the ‘participation scale’, which had resulted in the creation of quartiles in each class with regards to the children’s scores;

- to create a greater level of differentiation and analyse the subtleties associated with different children's participation patterns;

- to be able to detect and discuss the differences in the results at both extremes (i.e. either very positive or very negative results) as well as the reasons for their existence.

With regards to the statistical procedure followed, this was essentially the same as in chapter 7, apart from the above-mentioned fact that four clusters were now used.